

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

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NEW YORK, OCTOBER 10. 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AT BLACK RUN;

OR, TRAILING THE COINERS OF CANDLE CREEK.

By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



Suddenly the door flew open in the very face of the astounded coiner. In walked the Bradys, each with cocked revolvers, while Sam Tinker, with his rifle raised, pressed close behind.

"Good-morning to you, Mr. Bagnall!" cried Old King Brady.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT RIDE ON THE MARIAVILLE STAGE.

In these days, when everything is up to the minute, it does one good to take a run "away down east" and see how the people used to live in our grandfathers' days.

Not that we mean to say anything against New England enterprise and progress.

In all the large centres throughout that interesting country people are just as much up to date as anywhere else, but there are, here and there, places which are decidedly behind the times.

Bangor, Me., and the old lumber country stretching south from it toward the ocean is such a region.

Here it is as wild as the wildest part of the Wild West.

There is only one railroad running south from Bangor, which goes to Ellsworth and Bar Harbor.

East of this is a vast region of mountains, lakes and forest, which few know anything about and fewer care.

The only way to get down into this country is by stage or private conveyance, unless the traveller cares to patronize "Shank's mare."

Every night, at eight o'clock or thereabouts, the stages leave the Penobscot Exchange Hotel, at Bangor.

Some of these stages make runs of between one and two hundred miles through the forest.

They are those primitive old affairs known as the "Concord Coach," very similar to the stages still in use in the Far West.

It used to be a great sight to see these stages start away from the Exchange.

In olden times they went in all directions, north, south, east and west, covering the country from Portland to St. John, New Brunswick, and from Moosehead Lake and the Aroostook country, on the north, to Ellsworth, Cherryfield and Machias, on the south.

But nowadays the many railroads running in and out of Bangor have greatly reduced their number.

Perhaps one of the most noted ones still left is the Mariaville stage, which runs through the "Black Country" to Cherryfield over what used to be called the "Air Line," a distance of some seventy miles.

One September evening, a year or so ago, two gentlemen came out of the long dining-room at the Penobscot Exchange.

They had evidently just finished supper and were getting ready for the next move.

There was a strong contrast between them.

One was an elderly person, of peculiar appearance.

He was tall, thin-faced and wore a long-tailed blue coat, with brass buttons and a broad-brimmed, white felt hat.

His companion was a young fellow, who might easily have been his grandson.

He was dressed in the latest fashion; his face was not only exceedingly intelligent, but of regular features, with handsome teeth. In short, he was as stylish, good-looking a young fellow as one could ask to see.

The old gentleman walked up to the desk and said to the clerk:

"Can you tell me at what time the Mariaville stage starts?"

"It leaves at eight o'clock, sir. Where do you wish to go?"

"To Cherryfield."

"You'll find it a hard ride. Why not go via Ellsworth in the train?"

"For the reason that my young friend and I came down to Bangor for the express purpose of taking a ride through the woods."

"Well, you'll get all you want before you see Cherryfield," replied the clerk. "But if you are going on the Mariaville stage you had better engage your place right away; there are several passengers for Mariaville to-night."

"None for Cherryfield?"

"None but yourselves. Since the railroad was opened, nobody goes by stage."

The old gentleman engaged two places.

The names which had been signed to the hotel register were put upon the tickets.

That of the old gentleman was James Brady; the young man's name was given as Harry Brady.

Probably nothing could have shown more plainly what a far-away point Bangor is than the fact that the clerk did not recognize these two men as the world-famous detectives, the "Bradys."

It was, indeed, Old King Brady and his young assistant, and when the Mariaville stage rolled over the Brewer Bridge they occupied the box seat along with the driver and a dark-looking gentleman with a black beard sat on the roof seat, clinging to the little hand-rail to prevent being thrown off by the jolting of the stage.

The stage went whirling around the sand bluffs and struck off on the Eddington road.

"Fine night, gentlemen; geddap!" remarked Bill Cleves, the driver.

The first part of his remark was intended for whoever cared to make use of it, the last for the horses, who got the whip. But Bill Cleves spoke as if it was all one sentence.

It was a fine night.

Old King Brady said so.

Young King Brady assented to his remark.

The man with the black beard, clinging to the hand-rail, declared that it was very fine.

"'Spose you be from New York; giddop!" continued Cleves.

"That's right," said Young King Brady.

"Waal, neow, I wanter know. We don't get Yorkers down here much, but there's now and again a few Boston boys."

"Yes," said Young King Brady.

"Yaas. Well, New York's all right. I hain't sayin' nothing against it, only I never could see how people could content themselves to live so far away; giddup!"

Harry laughed.

"That depends upon where you start to measure from," he said.

"Yaas, that's right, tew. Now, I belong down teu M'ri'-ville. I wuz born an' raised there; but I've traveled and know the world pretty well. Yew see, I'm in Bangor twice a week, an' I've been to Augusta and Portland, and onct I was in St. John; gid-dorp! What's the matter with yew? Hi there! Behave yourself! Git on now! git on!"

Each remark brought out a crack of the whip and a tug at the lines.

That is the way down East stage drivers usually manage their teams.

They seem to think it is necessary to saw a horse's mouth to pieces in order to get any speed out of him.

Now all this talk on Bill Cleves' part was merely getting down to business.

What he wanted was to find out who his two seat mates were, and what was taking them to Cherryfield by the Mariaville stage.

"Say, gents," he broke out after a few moments' silence, "I want to introduce yew to Mr. Bagnall. Mr. Bagnall, this is Mister, Mister——. I forgit your name."

"That's all right," said Young King Brady, shaking hands with the man with the black beard. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

Old King Brady shook hands also.

Bill Cleves really had forgotten the name, for which Old King Brady was very glad.

It had been an oversight of Young King Brady's signing their true names to the register of the Penobscot Exchange.

Mr. Bagnall did not appear to be a man who had much to say.

He inquired if this was their first visit to Maine and there let it drop.

But Bill Cleves had no such idea.

Not having succeeded very well with Harry, he tackled Old King Brady, after they left the hotel at East Eddington, the old detective having now taken the seat on the inside, with Harry at the rail.

"Going fishing down Cherryfield?" Cleves asked.

"Why, yes," replied Old King Brady. "How did you know?"

"Guessed it. What you after—trout?"

"Yes. Can you put us onto a good place?"

"You can hardly find a bad one. Mr. Bagnall knows all about trout."

"Is that so?" replied Old King Brady, looking around at the man with the black beard.

"Yes, I'm somewhat posted in that regard," Mr. Bagnall replied.

"Perhaps you can put me wise on the subject of trout."

"Well, I have a little fishing box away up Candle Creek, where I'm bound for now. There are pretty good trout around there, but the streams are all held under lease."

"I see. You lease one?"

"I lease several, sir," replied Mr. Bagnall, loftily.

If Old King Brady expected to get an invitation to visit Mr. Bagnall's little fishing box on Candle Creek, he didn't—that was all.

There was silence for a few moments.

Bill Cleves giddapped, giddopped and giddupped, but no one seemed disposed to talk.

At last Old King Brady broke in with his deep voice:

"I was recommended in Boston to a place called the Black Run," he said. "Can you tell me anything about that?"

"We shall soon be in the Black Run, sir," replied Bagnall, loftily.

"From what does it derive its name?"

"This Mariaville road runs ten miles through a forest of spruce and hemlock, without a break, except Tom Maddock's house, where the stage stops."

"I see. Wild country?"

"Very."

"Good trout streams there?"

"Plenty."

"Candle Creek is up the Black Run," put in Bill Cleves.

"Mr. Bagnall leaves us at Tom Maddock's, and——"

"Be good enough to attend to your own affairs and leave mine alone, Mr. Cleves," broke in Mr. Bagnall. "The gentlemen are not interested to know where or when I intend to leave the stage."

"Just so," said Cleves. "Giddorp, thar! giddorp!"

Being sharply rebuffed, the driver now held his tongue.

The result was increased speed, and they had been making very good time before.

It was all up hill and down dale.

Young King Brady could hardly remember to have met with a rougher country, even in the Far West.

But this country differed from anything he had ever seen in the West, on account of the dense growth of trees.

It was forest—forest everywhere.

Often the trees so overhung the road that the branches switched Harry's face as they flew past.

"Look out for your hat, my boy!" said Old King Brady, who had changed seats to avoid losing his own.

"All right, governor. I'll take care. Wild country, this."

"Very."

"Has this land ever been cut over by the lumberman?"

"Every foot of it, and every stick of timber of any value removed."

"How long will it take for it to grow up so as to be good for lumbering again?"

"Well, that's a question I can't answer, but I presume Mr. Cleves can. How long do you say, Mr. Cleves?"

Mr. Cleves said fifty years.

He then proceeded to inform the detectives that they were already four miles in on the Black Run and two miles from Tom Maddock's house, where they would change horses.

During this conversation Old King Brady tried to draw Mr. Bagnall out again.

It was no use.

"I don't care to talk, gentlemen," said the man with the black beard at last, and that ended it, of course.

On rattled the stage until at last it entered upon what is called in Maine a "horseback."

This strange geological formation is of very common occurrence in that part of the country.

A horseback is a narrow, gravelly ridge of land crossing a ravine.

Some of these horsebacks are a mile or more in length and few are of greater width than from four to six feet.

Of course, this makes careful driving a necessity.

Bill Cleves started in on the horseback with a cut of the whip.

Bill was mad clear through at being called down by Mr. Bagnall.

Perhaps he struck the off horse a little viciously, but be that as it may, the animal suddenly shied.

"Whoa, back! whoa, back!" bawled Bill.

He was too late.

Crowded by his mate, the nigh horse lost his footing and slipped off the horseback.

All in an instant the Mariaville stage went tumbling down into the ravine.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRE AT TOM MADDOCK'S.

Everybody scared, nobody hurt, a ruined set of harness, a stage badly knocked to pieces and a horse with a broken leg.

This was how it stood with the Mariaville stage when Old King Brady came to take account of stock.

Bill Cleves did lots of swearing and so did Mr. Bagnall.

There was an old lady inside, who railed at the unfortunate driver for a good ten minutes, and a young woman, who fainted, besides a Mariaville farmer returning from a trip to Bangor, so drunk that he did not wake up even when Old King Brady and Harry dragged him from the wreck.

"Now then, Mr. Cleves, what are we to do?" asked Old King Brady, after matters had, in a measure, quieted down.

Cleves was something of a philosopher.

Considering that he owned the stage and the horses, he was very cool about it all.

"Waal, that's two—yaas three—things tew be done," he drawled. "Fust, you can all walk on to Tom Maddock's. Second, I can mount the off horse and ride there an' come back for you in a wagon. Third, you men can walk ahead to Maddock's, leaving me here with the women folks and this rum jug and get him to come back with a team."

"Won't the stage go through to Mariaville?" demanded the old lady. "I paid my fare, and I expect to be carried through."

"Waal, I dunno no way to take it through on three wheels till daylight," drawled Cleves. "I suppose there'll be some sort of a rigging'-up arrangement done then. Yew can wait and go with us if yew choose."

The old woman continued to sputter.

Mr. Bagnall said nothing.

Old King Brady thought it about time to take the lead.

"Mr. Bagnall," he said, "I think Mr. Cleves' last proposition is the proper one. We three had better walk on and send the team."

"Yew can have my lantern," said Cleves.

"You are right, sir," replied Mr. Bagnall. "We will go. It is a straight road and the distance is less than two miles."

They started soon afterward.

Old King Brady carried no baggage.

Harry had a dress suit case, a rifle and a bundle of fishing poles. Mr. Bagnall carried a small grip.

Being free-handed, Old King Brady took the lantern and walked ahead.

This threw Harry into company with Mr. Bagnall.

Before they had gone very far, that silent person began to talk.

"Let me see, I didn't get your name," was his first remark.

"Jackson," replied Harry.

It was safe to give a false name now, since they had parted with Cleves.

"I hope you don't think me discourteous, Mr. Jackson," said Bagnall. "That driver is such a nuisance when he gets to talking. He bores me so."

"He's a great talker. You come down this way frequently?"

"Well, I usually come three or four times during the season. I expect my own team to meet me at Maddock's."

"To take you to your fishing box up Candle Creek?"

"Yes. Should you find yourself in my neighborhood, I should be pleased to have you look in on me."

"We shall certainly do so, but I hardly think we shall get up as far as that."

"You don't intend to stay here long?"

"About a week. We shall go through to Cherryfield and make our headquarters there. You see, the governor don't care to camp in the woods."

"Meaning your father?"

"Meaning Mr. Perkins, my friend."

"Oh, I see. I thought he was your father."

"No."

Young King Brady could keep mum when he chose.

He allowed Mr. Bagnall to do the questioning for a few moments and then began himself.

He asked all about the best methods of trout fishing and without appearing to be particularly interested, inquired the way to reach Candle Creek.

This was unnecessary, as it happened.

Before leaving New York, the Bradys had thoroughly posted themselves on this point.

And right here Harry made a discovery about Mr. Bagnall which perplexed him not a little.

The information Mr. Bagnall gave him about the way to reach Candle Creek, which was supposed to be some twenty miles from the Black Run, right in the heart of the forest, was all wrong.

They were still talking when Old King Brady stopped and pointed to a small frame house with a big barn attached, which had just become visible among the trees.

"That, I take it, is Maddock's?" he said.

"That's Maddock's," replied Mr. Bagnall. "It's a wretched hole. I wish I could invite you to accompany me to my fishing box, gentlemen; but as our accommodations are limited and I am expecting a party of friends down from Boston to-morrow, I——"

"Don't mention it, sir," broke in Old King Brady. "We couldn't think of intruding on you."

Mr. Bagnall looked relieved.

They walked on to Maddock's, and knocking on the door, succeeded at last in routing out a dried-up, little, old Scotchman with a fiery red head.

"I always told Cleves he'd go off the horseback some of these fine nights," he declared. "The man don't know how to drive a team of horses and never did. By the way, Mr. Bagnall, your team is here, sir."

"Good!" cried Bagnall. "I suppose Charlie Davis drove it in?"

"He did. He's asleep upstairs. Thought he would get a little rest before starting out."

"Call him, please. I shall start at once. These gentlemen, I believe, want a room."

"You shall have one, gentlemen," replied Maddock. "I'll just see that it is all ready for you and then start back to help Cleves."

Tom Maddock led the way into a shabby little sitting-room, where there was a big stove taking up half the floor room, a sewing machine, a parlor organ and a centre table covering the rest.

Rather a pretty girl now appeared, looking as if she had just got out of bed, as was no doubt the case.

"The stage has broken down, Mirandy," said Maddock. "This old gentleman and his son want a room. Fix up the north chamber for them, please. Knock on the door of the east room as you are preparing and tell Charlie Davis that Mr. Bagnall is here and he must get up right away."

Mirandy threw an admiring glance at Young King Brady, which she made no pretence of concealing, and hurried away.

In a few moments a tall, foxy-faced man appeared, who greeted Mr. Bagnall with a nod.

"Get the team ready, Charlie," said Bagnall. "We want to make a quick start."

"All right. I'll hitch up," replied Charlie.

"I'll help you," added Bagnall, and they both started for the barn.

It was the first opportunity the Bradys had found to say a word to each other since the accident.

Harry gave the old detective a meaning look, and they went out on the piazza.

"Well," said Old King Brady, "you want to say something. What is it, my boy?"

"I wanted to ask a question."

"Ask it."

"What do you think of Bagnall?"

"He is one of our men."

"I think so. Don't you?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Make anything out of him?"

"I'm sure he's on to us."

"I don't want to criticise, Harry, but that is your fault."

"I'm afraid it is. No doubt he has seen the register at the Penobscot Exchange. It was very foolish in me to sign our own names."

"It certainly was. Did he ask our names while he was talking to you?"

"Yes."

"And you told him Brady, I hope."

"Governor, I didn't."

"Worse and worse. You ought to. We might have passed for other Bradys."

"Impossible while you will persist in dressing as you do."

"That's one on me. Well, you are right. We should have disguised."

"Too late now. But who in the world would ever have supposed that we should strike one of them on the stage?"

"We acted hastily and blundered. There must be no more of this."

"Shall you make any move, or just let him go?"

"Let him go, of course. If our plans work out to a finish, it must not be long before we meet again."

"We had better pull apart now."

"No, stand your ground."

"But they will be along in a minute with the team."

"Let them come. Here, light a cigar and appear as indifferent as possible."

"Thanks. Have you a match? Mine are all in the dress suit case."

"Yes; here is one."

"What do you think of Charlie Davis?"

"He's one, of course, if the other is."

"A cheap country scoundrel."

"Exactly."

"Probably the easiest one for us to tackle."

"Don't know about that. I should have to see more of him before I could decide."

"What do you say to—but here they come!"

The sound of wheels was heard, and a wagon, drawn by two horses, came rattling around from the barn.

It proved to be Tom Maddock on his way to assist Bill Cleves.

But right behind him came a strong, well-built light wagon, drawn by two fine horses.

Charlie Davis was driving and Mr. Bagnall sat on the back seat.

"Good night, gentlemen!" called the Boston man. "I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"Good night," said Old King Brady.

"Good night," added Harry.

"Be sure and come and see me if you get up around Candle Creek," called Mr. Bagnall, and they drove on, disappearing among the trees.

"They may see us before they think for, eh, governor?" chuckled Harry.

"Don't know," replied Old King Brady. "After all, we may be entirely wrong. It is hard to tell."

Soon after Miranda appeared and announced that the room was ready.

The Bradys immediately retired to it, and had a taste of the discomforts of a Maine feather bed.

The room was situated on the second floor of a sort of ell or addition to the house.

A tall pine tree outside the window kept up a dismal sighing.

Old King Brady, who could sleep anywhere, was soon fast asleep.

Not so with Harry.

He felt unusually nervous, and the sighing of the pine tree helped to keep him awake.

There was some little noise about the house for a short time, but it soon quieted down.

Harry got to thinking of the business which had brought them out to this lonely region.

It was no use to try to get sleep; slumber would not come.

Harry had just about come to the conclusion to get up and dress himself when all at once his attention was attracted to a new sound.

It was a curious crackling and seemed to be outside of the house.

Harry listened for a few minutes and then sprang out of bed and hurried to the window.

Throwing up the sash, he thrust his head out.

Immediately he drew it in again, exclaiming:

"Governor! governor! wake up! We're all afire here!"

Old King Brady, although sound asleep, sprang to his feet at the call.

"Afire!" he cried. "Harry! What do you mean?"

"Dress yourself quick!" said Harry, pulling on his trousers. "Some one has fired a pile of brush wood up

against the house. As true as you stand there, governor, it's a game to burn us in our beds!"

CHAPTER III.

KICKED OUT.

The detectives, having dressed themselves, hurried downstairs and out of the house.

Running around to the end of the ell, they found a bad state of affairs.

As Harry had stated, a lot of brush wood had been piled against the house and in some way had taken fire.

Already the weather-boarding was all ablaze and there was no water at hand.

The Bradys dragged away the burning boughs and tried to beat the fire out.

While they were thus engaged the girl, Miranda, opened a window and began to scream.

"Is anything the matter? Is the house on fire? Oh, what shall I do?" she cried.

"Where's the pump?" called Harry. "Where can we get a pail?"

"The well is down by the barn!" screamed Miranda. "You'll find a pail there. My mother is sick in bed, and there's no man about the place but you! How shall I ever get her out?"

"Keep cool!" shouted Old King Brady. "We can handle this blaze all right with a few buckets of water. If there is any need to take your mother out, I'll come up and carry her downstairs in my arms."

This seemed to reassure the girl, and she drew away from the window, while the Bradys made a bolt for the well.

They had not overestimated their ability to handle the fire.

In a few minutes they had checked it entirely.

By this time Miranda Maddock had dressed herself and came out into the yard.

"Waal, I want to know what this all means," she exclaimed in the broad Maine dialect. "Looks as though somebody was trying to burn us out."

"That certainly is the case, Miss," said Old King Brady. "Was that brush wood piled up against the house?"

"No, indeed. It was heaped up over there by the fence."

"Then who could have done it?"

"Don't ask me. It looks mighty strange."

"You say there is no man about the house?"

"No one but you."

"Surely you don't suspect us?"

"How can I? You would have been burned up like the rest of us, I guess."

"But, from the way you spoke——"

"Oh, I was only a-thinking."

"Well, don't think such a thing. We were both asleep when the crackling of the flames awakened us."

"I wasn't asleep," said Harry. "If I had been, I don't know where we should be now."

"Are there any neighbors who have a grudge against you?" asked Old King Brady.

"Good Lord! man, we haven't any neighbors," replied the girl, sharply. "This is the Black Run. There isn't a house within five miles of this."

"What about Charlie Davis?"

Miranda drew herself up.

"Waal, that's pretty good, tew," she said, sharply. "To go and accuse my steady company. Why I've known Mr. Davis all my life. I rather guess he wouldn't do such a thing. We're engaged. Besides, he drove away with Mr. Bagnall an hour ago."

"Then I give it up," said Old King Brady; "but somebody did it."

"Tramps," suggested Harry.

"We don't never have none here," declared Miranda. "Tramps would starve to death on the Black Run."

Just then the conversation was cut short by the rattle of wheels.

Tom Maddock was evidently coming.

In a moment he drove up with the stage passengers, Bill Cleves riding the horse behind.

"Oh, father! they tried to set the house afire!" Miranda screamed.

"What? what?" cried the old Scotchman. "Who tried? What kind of work is this?"

"I don't know who did it," chattered Miranda, "but these gentlemen discovered the fire, and I expect they know more'n I dew about it; so you had better ask them."

The Bradys saw that they were likely to get themselves into trouble.

"All that we know about the fire, Mr. Maddock, is that we discovered it," said Old King Brady. "Some one placed the brush wood against the house. You can go around and see for yourself how the case stands."

There were a few chairs on the piazza, and having said this, Old King Brady sat down and began to smoke, talking to Harry in an undertone.

The passengers went into the sitting room.

The drunken man was dumped on the piazza by Tom Maddock and Cleves, and the horses put in the barn.

It was some little time before any one came near the Bradys, and then it was Maddock himself.

"I don't know what to say to you gents," he began; "but I'll tell you plump and plain, I don't want you here."

"Don't want us here!" cried Old King Brady. "Man, what do you mean?"

"Well, it's no matter about that. I don't want no argument and I don't propose to have any; but you'll just have to get along."

"Do you mean to hint that we set your house on fire?"

"Mirandy thinks so. She's most always dead right about such things."

"Mirandy is entirely wrong. She was in bed and asleep when the fire broke out. If it had not been for us, Mr. Maddock, your house would have been burned to the ground."

"It may be as you say, but all the same, you two have got to leave."

"This is very unreasonable. Do you mean to turn us adrift in the forest at this hour in the morning?"

"There's the road!"

"You keep a public house. We claim the right of travelers to remain here until daylight."

"I keep nothing of the sort. I merely take care of the stage passengers as a matter of accommodation. It's no use talking. You have got to go!"

"But have you no gratitude? If it hadn't been for us, your invalid wife might now be dead."

"My what!" cried Tom Maddock, staring at the detective blankly.

"Your invalid wife. Your daughter said——"

"Now, look here, captain, this won't go down. Mirandy never said nothing of the sort. Why, man, my wife has been dead these ten years! Come now, get on and don't bother me no more. If there was any way of arresting you, I'd do it, you bet."

Young King Brady was about to make some remark in answer to this rough speech, but the old detective cut him short.

"Never mind, Harry," he said. "We'll not stay where we are not wanted. Go upstairs and get our things together, and we'll get on the move."

"I'll go with you, young man," said Maddock. "I don't trust you in my house alone."

"Suit yourself," replied Harry, starting upstairs.

"Hold on, friend. How much do we owe you?" called Old King Brady.

"You don't owe me nothing. I don't want your money nor your company. I don't want nothing at all to do with

you," said Tom Maddock, and he bolted upstairs after Young King Brady.

"Say, this is kinder hard lines," remarked Bill Cleves, who stood near the doorway and had heard all.

"The man must be crazy!" said Old King Brady. "We had no more to do with the fire than you had, Mr. Cleves."

"I'm sure you hadn't. Tom Maddock is a crank, anyhow. Tell you what you do. Walk along kinder easy. I'm going to borry his wagon and leave the stage where it is for the present. I'll overtake you before an hour's time and carry you on to Cherryfield."

"Oh, thank you. That will be first rate."

"And, say, look out for the second bridge, where you cross Candle Creek," continued Cleves. "It's very narrer, and it's powerful dark along there. The creek is high jest now, and the railing is all broke away. If you should happen to make a misstep, it would be all day with you. You keant be tew careful there."

"Thank you," said Old King Brady again. "I shall keep a sharp lookout. Meanwhile you take this. It will help to make up for your loss. Come along as soon as you can."

Cleves got a five-dollar bill in return for his tip.

Soon afterward Harry came downstairs with his traps.

Old King Brady took the fishing poles and Harry carried the gun and dress suit case.

Tom Maddock, never saying a word, stood watching them as they moved away.

"Look back at the upper window and see if you see anything of that girl watching us," said Old King Brady as they passed out of the gate.

"She's there all right, governor."

"I thought so."

"The treacherous little cat! What does she mean by it all?"

"Her meaning is plain enough, Harry."

"Looks so. She knows all about the Candle Creek business, governor."

"You bet she does. She knows all that her lover, Charlie Davis, knows; but don't look so glum about it, Harry. This is just the thing for us."

"What is? What do you mean?"

"I mean being kicked out of that house the way we were."

"Still I don't understand you."

"I'll make it plain. Bagnall is on to us, is he not?"

"We think so."

"Very good. Then, now is just the time for the Bradys to do the disappearing act."

"Your old style."

"Old or not, it always works. Perhaps you understand

now why I insisted on coming down here to the Black Run without disguise."

"I might have known. How are we going to manage it?"

"Wait till we get to the second bridge," said Old King Brady. "I think I'm all straight on this business. Anyhow, I've just paid five dollars for a pointer from Brother Cleves."

The Bradys trudged on in the dark.

Never was there a spot more horribly lonely, for the dark-growth forest was on both sides of them and many of the trees were as much as a hundred feet in height.

Soon they came to a place where a stream crossed the road.

Old King Brady flashed his dark lantern upon the bridge.

It was a new one and was provided with a good hand-rail.

"The next is what we want," said the detective. "That will be Candle Creek, and we must hurry to get up there ahead of Cleves."

The second bridge proved to be about a mile further on.

It was a wretched old affair, crossing a creek twenty feet wide, which came rushing out of the forest with considerable force.

Hand-rail there had once been, but it was all broken away now.

Any one might easily have walked off in the darkness.

"A danger spot, sure," said Harry. "Governor, do we disappear here?"

"We do. Hark! Can you hear wagon wheels?"

"No."

"Then there is time to act. Open the dress suit case, boy!"

Harry did so, and Old King Brady took out of it a big white hat, the very duplicate of the one he wore.

"Take out what few things you want and put them in your pockets, Harry," said the old detective. "The rest goes by the board."

He went to the down side of the bridge, and leaning over, dipped the hat in the water.

Then giving it a dexterous fling by aid of the lantern's light, the hat lodged on the branch of a bush which projected out of the water.

"Stay there," said Old King Brady.

"It will be all right," replied Harry.

"Drop the dress suit case on the bridge on its side. So."

"All right. Hadn't I better break a bit off this rotten plank at the end to make it look as if we had gone in there?"

"Yes, do it. Look out, though, you don't go in for a fact."

"Done! There, that's better. I haven't got to give up the fishing pole, have I, governor?"

"No, I propose to keep the fishing pole and the rifle. We may have use for both in these woods."

"Ready?"

"All ready, and none too soon, for here comes Cleves!"

The rattle of wagon wheels could be heard in the distance.

The Bradys, having set their trap, shot into the bushes on the east side of the creek, to see how it was going to work.

CHAPTER IV.

UP CANDLE CREEK.

On came the wagon. Cleves was driving. The old lady sat beside him; the younger woman sat in the back seat.

The drunken gentleman from Mariaville was not in evidence, having been left to "sleep it out" at Tom Maddock's.

Cleves had one of his stage lanterns fastened to the dashboard.

He reined in as he reached the bridge.

"Well! well! well!" he exclaimed. "Thar, ma'am, what did I tell you? These here Yorkers be such a stupid lot. In spite of my warning, they have gone and drowned themselves jest as sure as a gun."

"Good Lord! Don't tell me so!" screamed the old woman.

"Well, ma'am, I don't have to tell you. Say, you orter be able to see for yourself. Thar's the young feller's bag a-laying on the bridge, and, sure as shootin', thar's the old man's hat caught onto a bush!"

"Dreadful!" cried the younger woman.

"Shocking!" piped the old woman on the front seat.

"I can see jest how it happened," said Cleves; "jest as plain as though I'd been here."

"How?" demanded the old woman.

"The old man stumbled and went in head first. The young feller catched him, and in trying to pull him out, that 'ere rotten plank end broke and he went in, tew."

"Oh, oh!" cried the old woman. "Don't let's talk about it. Do drive on, Mr. Cleves!"

"Waal, I will," said Cleves. "Might's well collar that 'ere grip of his'n, though. Twon't never be no more use to the poor shoat that I kin see."

So Cleves collared the dress suit case and drove on toward Mariaville, leaving the Bradys chuckling in the bushes at the success of their scheme.

"We are all right now, governor," said Harry as soon as they were out of hearing.

"Of course. It will be all around by to-morrow night that we were drowned in Candle Creek."

"Perhaps that will be too late to do us much good."

"Oh, don't you fret. We are not going to work this thing quite as quick as you may think."

"Do we go ahead?"

"Not until daylight. It is altogether too treacherous a country here on the Black Run. We might be caught at our own game."

"Then what do you propose?"

"This is a comfortable place and quite secluded. I propose to lie down and go to sleep."

"Suppose we are attacked by wolves?"

"None here. Only bobcats and Indian devils."

"What's the last?"

"A sort of wolverine. Very scarce, though."

"All right then; we will chance it."

So the Bradys made themselves as comfortable as they could until sunrise came.

Then it was a very frugal breakfast.

Old King Brady had a small supply of provisions stowed away in his mysterious pockets.

Harry caught two fine trout and broiled them over a wood fire, which helped out a lot.

A little further on a wood road turned off from the "Air Line," leading up Candle Creek.

This the Bradys started to follow.

They had not gone far before the clatter of horses' hoofs in the distance attracted their attention.

"Some one coming, governor!" Harry exclaimed.

"That's from the direction of the Mariaville road, too."

"Yes. No team, though."

"No, only a horse."

The detectives turned aside into the forest.

In a moment a horse, ridden by a young girl in man fashion, went tearing past.

"Ah, there, my dear!" muttered Old King Brady. "I thought as much."

"You said so from the first, governor."

"I knew it. There goes Miss Miranda to warn the coiners of Candle Creek that we are on their track!"

"Let her go," said Harry, "and now that we have a quiet chance to talk at last, suppose you explain this business to me. Remember, I have not been posted yet."

"I know. We might as well go at it now. Since I picked you up in Boston we really have not had a fair chance to talk with no danger of being overheard."

"No danger now, I fancy."

"Not a bit, with Miranda Maddock on the other side of us."

"How did you come to get the case, governor?"

"I was sent for by the chief of the Secret Service Bureau. He explained that they had received information that a gang of coiners had located in these woods, on the Black Run, somewhere in the vicinity of Candle Creek, and he ordered me to come up here at once and obtain all the information about them I could."

"No orders to arrest?"

"We are free to arrest, of course; but it is not expected that we will get the chance."

"We may."

"I believe you. What is more, if possible, we must."

"Who is supposed to be the leader of this gang?"

"He is not known. The stuff they are making is of pure silver, half dollars, quarters and dimes. You see, the low price of silver leaves them something like forty per cent. profit."

"I see. If they can only turn out enough of the stuff, it's a very profitable scheme."

"That's what it is. Boston has been flooded with these queer coins. It is known that they have been shipped from Cherryfield on potato schooners. Information from Cherryfield went to show that the boxes came down from the Candle Creek country."

"Is it known who brought them down?"

"Not certainly; a man is suspected. From the description I got of him, I should say that this fellow Charlie Davis pretty well fills the bill."

"Does Bagnall fill any bill?"

"No. I should never have suspected the man if it had not been for the way he acted."

"And his talk about that little fishing box on Candle Creek."

"Exactly. I fancy he's one of the coiners all right."

"Then he must be the head of the gang."

"That's just what I think."

"In which case we could not possibly have come along at a better time."

"Right. Now, Harry, we must try and put this case through to our usual successful finish, and the first thing is to find out what's doing at Mr. Bagnall's little fishing box on Candle Creek."

"And your plan?"

"Haven't anything definite yet in my head. We have our disguises, though."

"Yes, and they are bully good ones. How did you come to think of them?"

"Well, you see, I naturally wanted to get in with these coiners, and I could think of no better rigging for the pur-

pose. I think we shall be able to make them work all right."

Disguising is, of course, a specialty with the Bradys, as everybody knows.

No man living ever fully solved the mystery of Old King Brady's long blue coat.

Without materially altering its appearance, Old King Brady could carry stuff enough in the secret pockets of this wonderful garment to stock a small shop.

Harry was similarly provided, but in a less degree, for it was always Young King Brady's part to play the up-to-date young man, and stuffed pockets do not improve the set of fashionable clothes.

The Bradys toiled on along the wood road without knowing exactly where they were going, but always sticking to the road, well aware that as long as they did so they could not go far astray, roads being a scarce article on the Black Run.

It has been often remarked that the Bradys are in some respects the luckiest detectives in the business.

A piece of rare good luck was about to come their way now, which was to prove of some service to them in tracking the coiners of Candle Creek.

So far the road had kept well back from the creek, something necessary as the banks were decidedly broken.

After the detectives had covered a distance of some ten miles, however, the woods became more open and the road ran right along the bank, bringing them presently to a branch stream, which entered Candle Creek from the south.

"Hist!" exclaimed Harry as they drew near this stream. "A boat!"

"That's what," replied Old King Brady. "We must look into this."

The detectives stole cautiously forward.

The boat was quite a large affair, with four oars.

It was filled with goods, forward and astern.

There were two barrels and several boxes and three packages done up in brown paper.

There seemed to be no anchor out nor was the boat fastened to a tree.

"Run aground," said Old King Brady in a whisper.

"Right," replied Harry; "but who is managing the thing?"

"I'll be blest if I see any one."

"Nor I either. Yet there must be some one around."

"Looks as though the boat was bound up to the coiners' shop all right."

"That's what it does. But we must be cagey, governor—very cagey, unless we want to be caught."

"You are thinking that it may be a trap, Harry?"

"And why not?"

"True. One has been sprung on us by that girl."

"How do you mean?"

"Her idea was to drive us into the woods without a guide."

"Probably it was Charlie Davis who suggested it."

"Like enough. Stay here, Harry. No use in both of us getting caught in the trap."

"Let me go, governor."

"No, no. Do as I tell you. When it comes to this close trailing, experience tells; besides, if I get into this trap, I want you to pull me out."

Old King Brady went on among the trees so noiselessly that Harry could scarcely hear a footfall.

He watched, saw the detective approach very close to the boat and then saw him retreat.

"Well?" breathed Harry when he returned to his side.

"It is very mysterious," whispered Old King Brady, "but I should say that we had run up against a case of murder."

"Murder! What do you mean?"

"There's a man there on the shore lying flat on his face."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"And the boat?"

"Is aground for a fact. The creek is a bit shallow there."

"Nobody else around?"

"Nobody that I could see."

"It can hardly be a trap, governor, or the fellow would have turned on you."

"Might, if he had seen me, which he didn't."

"Shall we go forward?"

"Yes. Have your rifle all ready, boy."

The Bradys crept on, coming up with the man.

He was a big bulky fellow, roughly dressed.

As Old King Brady had said, he lay flat on his face on the grass, and now Harry's sharp eyes spied a little pool of blood close to his left side, and he pointed to it.

"Ha!" breathed Old King Brady. "I didn't see that. Yes, yes."

"No sham here."

"Not a bit."

Old King Brady hurried to the man's side and turned him over.

His face was deathly pale. He had been stabbed near the heart, as a wound in his side showed.

But life was not yet extinct.

The man's eyes opened, his lips moved, he seemed to be trying to speak.

"That you, boss?" he muttered. "That you? Tony did it, but I did him!"

Now, for the first time, the Bradys perceived that the man clutched a revolver.

"His mind wanders," breathed Old King Brady. "He takes me for some one else."

He knelt at the side of the dying man and raised his head.

"Tell me about it," he said. "Tell me all you can before you die."

"Die! die! Who's going to die?" shrieked the man, suddenly raising himself up.

He was the doomed one!

It was his last effort.

The last word was no more than uttered when he fell back dead!

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO CONVICTS IN THE BOAT.

"He's a goner!" exclaimed Harry.

"That's what," replied Old King Brady. "There has been foul play here."

"Double foul play, if his last words can be believed."

"There has been a fight, sure."

"And those four oars show that there were two men in this boat."

"They do. We must look around for Tony."

"Who is dead, if this fellow is to be believed."

"His mind was wandering. There is no telling how much he knew of what he was saying."

"By Jove, governor, there he is!"

Harry pointed down into the water.

There lay the body of a man on his back in the shallows.

He was a dark, swarthy looking fellow.

There was a bullet hole in his forehead.

The Bradys dragged him out of the water and laid the body on the bank alongside the other man.

"It was a fight, of course," said Old King Brady.

"Must have taken place after the boat went aground."

"Undoubtedly."

"Probably they both belong to the Candle Creek gang."

"That's what they do, no doubt. Well, they must be searched."

Old King Brady took the man who had just died, Harry the one who had been dragged out of the water.

"There's only a few dollars on him and an old brass watch," he said at length.

Immediately he corrected himself, however.

"Here's a lot of halves and quarters!" he called out.

"Yes, yes!" cried Old King Brady. "This fellow has a lot of the same stuff in his pocket and here's a batch of bills for these goods made out in Brother Bagnall's name."

"That settles it. They belong to the gang."

"They certainly do."

"These coins are all counterfeit, I suppose?"

"Mine are."

"Look at mine."

"All bad," Old King Brady said as he looked at the coins.

"What do you make of it all, governor?"

"Why, I think the reading of the case is perfectly plain. These two men are members of the gang."

"Sure."

"They have been sent to Cherryfield with a load of queer coin."

"Probably."

"They were returning with a load of provisions for the camp."

"Certainly."

"Their boat, getting aground, they quarreled, got into a fight and killed each other like the Kilkenny cats."

"As usual, your conclusions are mine. Now then, what shall we do?"

"Change cars, I guess, Harry."

"When you say cars, you mean clothes?"

"I do."

"And take the boat up to the camp?"

"Yes."

"And our own clothes? It will never be safe to go up to the camp in a double rig."

"We must risk it. We might need to make a quick change. I can do the dressing all right."

And Old King Brady, as usual, was as good as his word.

The detectives pulled off their clothes and recourse to the mysterious pockets was had.

It took a little time to make the change.

When all was finished, two men in convict's striped suits stood by the stranded boat.

All the other garments were beneath these suits, and yet so skilfully had Old King Brady arranged it that no one would for a moment have suspected that such was the case.

"It's perfect," said Harry. "I didn't believe you could do it."

"Yet it is done."

"Yes."

"Shall we start now?"

"I am ready."

The Bradys got aboard the boat and made a hasty examination of the cargo.

There was a barrel of flour, a barrel of potatoes, boxes of bread, crackers, canned goods and other things.

"Laying in winter supplies," said Old King Brady. "They will be surprised when they see these things come into camp in charge of a new expressman. Here goes to get this boat afloat."

It was a troublesome job.

Quite a little of the cargo had to be put on the bank.

The boat was moved at last, and the stuff loaded on again.

The Bradys then took the oars, turned into Candle Creek and pulled up stream.

The fishing pole and rifle they left in the woods.

The bodies of the two men they drew up among the bushes and covered them with leaves.

There were no facilities for burying them, and, besides this, the old detective thought that very likely they would be called upon to exhibit them later on.

There were no very shallow places in Candle Creek that they saw.

Indeed, as they advanced, it seemed to grow deeper.

It was hard pulling so heavy a load against the strong current, especially when overburdened with clothes as the Bradys were.

For a distance of as much as eight miles the pretended convicts pulled the boat on up Candle Creek without coming to even a break in the everlasting forest.

At length two high, wooded hills began to loom up ahead.

The creek evidently came down out of some ravine between them.

Old King Brady saw that the head of navigation was almost reached.

"It can't be much further, Harry," he remarked.

"Not beyond those hills—no."

"Certainly not. Brace up now. We shall soon be up against the coiners of Candle Creek, for whatever that implies."

"We are good for them, governor."

"We must be good for them or our lives are not worth a moment's purchase. Better let me do most of the talking, boy."

"I'm willing," replied Harry, and they pulled on.

They had not gone far before the stream began to narrow.

The trees arched themselves over the water, and the boat ran on beneath them.

Suddenly the sharp report of a rifle was heard, and a shot striking the water went skimming along close to the boat.

"Stop!" breathed Old King Brady.

The detectives pulled in their oars and looked all around.

There was no one to be seen, no trace of a house.

Everywhere the same desolation prevailed.

"What shall we do?" whispered Harry.

"I'll give 'em the call," replied Old King Brady.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Who fired that gun?"

"Well, I guess as how I am the man," answered a drawly voice ahead of them.

The voice seemed to come from the air.

Looking up and ahead, Old King Brady spotted a man with a rifle, perched in the branches of a big hemlock, which overhung the stream.

"Well," said Old King Brady.

"Well!" drawled the man in the tree.

"Anything more doing in the lead line?"

"That depends."

"Upon what? We don't want to be killed."

"Who be yew two fellers? What State's prison did yew escape from?" demanded the man.

He leaned a bit forward as he spoke.

For the first time the Bradys caught sight of his face, and saw that they were dealing with Charlie Davis, the man who had driven Mr. Bagnall into the woods.

"Neighbor," said Old King Brady, "don't shoot us. We've had a hard time of it. I know our looks are against us, but we are no thieves."

"Rats!" drawled Davis. "Mebbe you are murderers as well as thieves. Where did you steal that boat?"

"Does it belong to you?"

"It belongs to my boss."

"We thought likely we would find the owner if we kept on up the creek. Say, we've got something to tell your boss about his boat."

"Tell me."

"I'd rather deal at headquarters."

Davis raised his rifle threateningly.

"Tell me!" he repeated. "There's going to be trouble if you don't."

"All right," said Old King Brady. "Alongside this boat we found a dying man, stabbed to the heart. He braced up enough to say that Tony had done him up."

"I knew it!" cried Charlie Davis. "I always told Sam Tinker that Tony would kill him one of these trips."

"Well, he did," replied Old King Brady, "providing you can believe what he said."

"Sam gives it out straight. Is he dead?"

"He died in my arms right away afterward," said Old King Brady. "We looked around for the other man, and found him dead in the creek near where the boat was aground."

"Gee!" cried Davis, "that was Sam Tinker's work. He swore he was ready for Tony all the time, and if he tried to do him, he would never escape alive!"

"That's what he said to us," replied Old King Brady. "'Tony did me and I did him,' those were his words."

"And where are they?"

"We covered the bodies with leaves and left them under the trees."

"Good enough! If you had buried them, the boss would never have believed your story, nor me either. I do believe it as it is, for I always knew it was going to happen. But, say, you didn't tell me where you came from, and I axed you that at first."

"Neighbor," replied Old King Brady, "men such as we are don't care to talk much about themselves. We have been hunted for three weeks like wild beasts. We are half starved and all played out. What we want is food and rest and other clothes. You look like a decent sort of fellow, and hoping that you may help us to get what we need so much, I'm going to tell you the truth. We have escaped from Thomaston State's prison, where we have been shut up, me for five years and the lad for two, both innocent of any crime."

"Hello!" exclaimed Charlie Davis; "I thought so. Well, they all say they are innocent. But, look here, I don't

lay down on a man because he's in trouble. Who can tell if a feller mightn't fetch up in Thomaston himself some of these fine days? I don't know how far the boss will stand for it, but I'm going to let you go on."

"Thank you," said Old King Brady; "but where do we fetch up?"

"Where that boat belongs. Pull ahead."

"I'd like to know a little something about it first. Are you game warden here?"

"That's what I am. Candle Creek is a leased trout stream. The lease belongs to a Boston gent. He's here in camp now."

"I'm afraid of him," said Old King Brady, shaking his head. "You take the boat and we will light out. You'll find everything right here. Hungry as we are, we haven't touched a thing."

"You'll pull the boat on up the creek or I'll fire!" retorted Charlie Davis, threateningly. "There's no two ways about that."

"Well, if you say so, I suppose it has to be so," replied Old King Brady with a sigh. "We're all played out, anyhow. I guess it don't make much difference whether we live or die."

"All right," said Davis, "I'll go with you then. Pull in near shore."

The detectives obeyed.

Charlie Davis descended the tree and came aboard the boat.

"Say," he exclaimed suddenly, "did you fellers happen tew see anything of an old man and a young feller just about like yew too anywhere in your travels last night or early this morning?"

"Well, now," exclaimed Old King Brady, looking at Harry, "those fellows must have been friends of this gent, Jack."

"You have seen them? Tell me all about it," said Charlie, eagerly.

"Does he suspect us?" thought Young King Brady. "He must. Now I wonder what the governor means to do."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRADYS TRACK THE COINERS TO THEIR DEN.

Young King Brady need not have worried about the old detective.

Old King Brady was able to read the workings of Charlie Davis' mind perfectly well.

"The girl has probably heard a rumor of our supposed death and has told him," was what the detective thought.

"Why, it's this way," he said aloud. "We came up Candle Creek last night."

"Do most of your travelling in the night time?" Charlie broke in.

"Yes, of course. Well, it was between two and three o'clock in the morning—can't say just the time, for, of

course, we have no watch. We came to a bridge then, and just as we were near to it, we heard some one talking. Two fellows were coming along the road."

"Yes, yes," put in Charlie, eagerly.

"Well, we laid low in the bushes."

"Look out how you go!" one of them said.

"Just then the moon came out a bit, and we saw a young fellow, a regular dude, coming over the bridge, carrying a dress suit case and a fishing pole. Behind him was an old man with a rifle. Probably he didn't see very well, for somehow he missed his footing and next we knew there was a splash."

"Went over the bridge where the rail was broken away?"

"Yes. The young fellow gave a yell and dropped his dress suit case. Next we knew, there was a cracking sound like boards breaking, and he pitched over into the water, too."

"By gum, is that so?" cried Charlie Davis.

"That's what happened. They must have both been drowned. We saw the old man swept by us. His hat lodged on a bush. We didn't see anything of the young fellow. He must have been drowned outright."

"You tell a straight story, b'gosh!" said Charlie. "But, say, why didn't you fetch the dress suit case along?"

"There was nothing in it that was any use to us, mister. We had all we could do to carry ourselves."

"Wall now, I've heard something of this before," said Charlie. "I guess you're straight all right. Glad you told me this. It makes me feel confidence in you like; but here we be. Now we will see what the boss has to say."

The boat had now reached the entrance to a narrow gorge, where Candle Creek came tumbling down over a mass of rugged rocks, some thirty feet high.

Two lofty, wooded hills rose on either side.

They had come to the head of navigation, and there on a rocky platform, just inside the gorge, stood a substantial log hut of considerable size.

"That's the fishing box," exclaimed Old King Brady. "Cap, I don't know about this."

"Have no fears," said Charlie Davis. "Only satisfy the boss that you are what you seem to be, and he will help you sure."

While he was speaking, Mr. Bagnall appeared at the door of the hut, rifle in hand.

"Davis, who are you bringing here? What does this mean?" he called down, sternly.

"It's all right, Mr. Bagnall. Look at the clothes on 'em and see for yourself. I'll come up and explain."

"It needs explanation. Where are Tony Puzzoli and Sam Tinker?"

"Gone to Halifax or some other seaport, just as I always told you would happen some day, boss."

"Do you mean that they are dead?"

"That's what I do."

"Did these two convicts kill them?"

"Kill nothing! They killed themselves."

"Ha! They were always scrapping. A case of Kilkenny cats."

"I dunno nothin' about no Kilkenny cats, only bobcat here in these woods."

"You're a fool, Davis!"

"Waal, neow, b'gosh, I don't like that sort of talk. What am I a fool about?"

"Cut it short."

"I hain't a-makin' it lengthy. That's you."

"Come up here, Davis! come up here! You two men stay where you are. Remember, you are covered by two rifles. Make a move and you will be shot dead!"

Davis got out of the boat, and making the boat fast to a tree, ascended the ledge by a series of rough, natural steps.

He joined Bagnall in front of the hut, and for fully fifteen minutes the pair talked in low tones.

The Bradys sat in the boat, watching them.

"We are up against it, governor," Harry whispered.

"That's what we are."

"How do you think it will end?"

"There's no telling. But I think it is sure to work around our way."

"We could hardly have come in here under more favorable circumstances."

"Certainly not."

"Only one thing I am afraid of."

"What's that?"

"That girl."

"Miranda Maddock?"

"Yes, of course."

"What about her?"

"She's as sharp as a needle. If she sees us, we are done for."

"A woman is a bad one in such cases, no doubt of that."

"Oh, you can bet on it. She gave me a look when we first came to her father's house, which took me all in. She'll never forget my face."

"We must hope for the best, Harry."

"Just what I am doing. I guess it will be all right. By the way, how came you to get these convicts' suits. I never thought to ask."

"I got them from a costumer in Boston I happen to know, who supplies the police detectives. By great good luck he happened to have two Maine State's prison suits on hand, and, what was better still, they were just your size and mine."

"It was downright good luck, and—hold on! Bagnall is ready for business now."

"Come up here, you two men, and tell your story!" called Bagnall from the ledge.

The Bradys obeyed.

The story they told was just the same yarn they had given Charlie Davis, with a few additions, about themselves.

Bagnall listened in silence until they were through talking, and then began to question them sharply.

"What are your names?" he demanded.

"I am Peter Sandford, this young man is Jack Jones," Old King Brady replied.

"Relations?"

"No."

"What were you sent to Thomaston for?"

"Well, boss, we were charged with shoving the queer."

"You were, eh?" Coin or bills?"

"Both."

"Of course, you were innocent?"

"Of course."

"Humph! How long since you escaped?"

"About three weeks."

"How did you come to get away?"

"They were working us at building a new road. We saw the chance to give the guards the slip and did it."

Bagnall eyed them for a few moments in silence.

Old King Brady would have given a lot to know what the man was thinking of just then.

"Well," he said at last; "you can stop here a few days. My man will go down the creek and take a look at those two bodies, and see whether or not they were done up by you fellows. He can tell."

"I'm glad he can tell," said Old King Brady, "because he will find that we had nothing at all to do with the business."

"I hope it will turn out that way, and I admit that I believe it will. If I didn't, you would be dead by this time, for I should have ordered you shot."

"I shouldn't care much," said Old King Brady. "I'm tired of life, anyhow."

"Life is all right if you make it so. If we find it all right and find you all right, I'm going to give you a good chance."

"At what?"

"Don't ask me now. You are perfectly safe from discovery. Now, lay around a few days and work for your keep. I shall be watching you, and if I find you all right, I'll put you in the way of making all the money you want. Do you agree?"

"We certainly do," replied Old King Brady. "You'll find us all right, boss; but in the meantime can't you give us a change of clothes?"

"In the meantime we will give you nothing but your grub. Your clothes are the only guarantee I have that you will stay here until I have time to find out who and what you are."

"All right, boss," replied Old King Brady; "we agree."

"Right! Jump in and unload that boat. Charlie will show you where to put the things."

"Boss," said Old King Brady quietly, "we will do just as you say. But we are mighty weak. It's near three weeks since we have had what you might call a square meal, and we haven't had so much as a bite in two days."

"So?" said Bagnall. "Well, that is easily fixed. Charlie, feed them and set them to work."

Thus saying, Bagnall turned and went into the hut.

This was the beginning of a week's hard work and nothing doing so far as the case was concerned.

There was no trace of anything like a queer coin shop to be discovered anywhere around the log hut.

Charlie Davis and three other men went down Candle Creek and buried the two bodies.

When they returned, Bagnall told the detectives that their story had proved true, and if they kept on working as well as they had he would soon be ready to talk business with them.

These three men with Bagnall and Charlie Davis seemed to be all the people there were around.

Nothing was seen of the girl, Miranda, much to Harry's relief.

All day long Bagnall and the three men were missing.

At night they came to the hut to dinner, and the Bradys sat down at the table with them, Charlie Davis acting as cook.

Where the four men got breakfast and lunch the detectives could not tell.

Old King Brady would allow no spying as yet.

He wanted Bagnall to get used to them, and even at the risk of having Miranda Maddock visit the camp, he felt that it would pay to wait.

Bagnall and Charlie slept in the hut, but the three men did not.

They only appeared at the evening dinner, smoked a pipe, talked a little and then walked out, and were seen no more that day.

But with the Bradys it was work, work, work all the time.

They were employed way down Candle Creek, making a road to connect with the wood road which led to Maddock's.

It was right hard work, too, and when the day's labors were over, the detectives were prepared to tumble into bed and sleep the sleep of the just.

And so matters went on until one night, about ten days after the arrival of the detectives, a man came up Candle Creek in a canoe.

He was just a typical Maine backwoodsman, and looked enough like Charlie Davis to be his brother.

Charlie met him at the foot of the steps.

There they stood talking for a few minutes, after which the man re-entered his canoe and paddled off down the creek, in spite of the fact that night was coming on.

The Bradys were washing up outside the hut at the time and saw all this.

"That means a change, Harry," said Old King Brady. "We will make a move to-night."

"I'm blame glad to hear you say so, governor."

"Hello! Tired of waiting?"

"I was never so tired of anything in all my life."

"Be patient. To move too soon would only be to spoil everything. When we leave this place, I want to know the whole story, and no half-way measures will satisfy me. But hush! Here comes Bagnall. We must be talking about something else."

Bagnall came down the gorge, as he always did when returning to the hut.

He invariably carried a fishing rod with him and had it now. Often there were fine trout on the table, but Charlie Davis caught those. The detectives never saw Bagnall bring in any fish.

"Well, Peter, how are you to-night?" said Bagnall as he came along.

"Good and tired," replied Old King Brady.

"Through with your new road yet?"

"Boss, we ran her through to the other road before we quit."

"Good enough! You have done fine. To-morrow we will talk business. How would you like to take a trip down the creek?"

"Suits me all right."

"And your partner?"

"I'm satisfied to stay here for the present till they get tired of looking for us," Young King Brady replied.

"How would you like to stay all winter?"

"Cold work?"

"No, warm work. Inside work and light at that."

"It would just suit me, if I could make anything out of it."

"You would be surprised at what you can make out of it. But we will talk of this to-morrow," replied Bagnall, and he passed into the hut.

That night the Bradys retired early.

They slept together in the second story of the hut.

Bagnall slept on the ground floor and Charlie Davis in a small room next to theirs.

Until some time after midnight Harry slept soundly, and then he was suddenly awakened by the presence of the old detective's hand on his forehead.

"Harry, wake up!"

"Hello! that you, governor? Up and dressed. Something doing at last."

"At last. Are you awake all right?"

"Wide."

"Get up and dress yourself. I'm going to show you something, boy."

"All right. I'm ready in no time."

Harry never dressed faster.

Old King Brady meanwhile stood at the door, which was slightly open, listening.

"Not a soul stirring," he whispered; "but we can't be too careful. It is not long since Bagnall went to bed."

"Have you been on the watch all night, governor?"

"Harry, I have been on the watch every night. I have scarcely slept more than two hours at a time since we have been in this place."

"What did you do that for? Why on earth didn't you let me share the watch with you?"

"Pshaw! You are young and need your sleep, but I am an old man, and two hours always does me."

"You ought not to have done it."

"Never mind now. We must act. Follow me."

Old King Brady passed out into the passage and led the way to the gable end of the hut.

There was a window here, which he cautiously raised.

Harry saw that one of the old detective's famous rope ladders had been fastened to it and hung down to the ground.

"Do we go down the ladder, governor?" he asked.

"We do," was the reply. "I have been down three nights running, and have not been discovered. I guess we are safe enough now."

Harry descended to the ground.

Old King Brady got out upon the ladder, closed the window and followed him.

"Where do we go?" Harry asked.

"Follow me."

"Governor, this isn't a fair shake."

"What isn't?"

"Cutting me off from the case."

"Nonsense! I haven't cut you off from the case."

"Yes, you have. Your orders were no spying."

"I meant that they should apply to you, not to me."

"I don't think much of your argument."

"Never mind. We mustn't talk. Follow me."

This was final, and Harry stopped talking.

Old King Brady, after a careful look around, led the way up the gorge past the waterfall.

The way was exceedingly rough.

It was all Harry could do to pull himself up over the rocks.

Luckily, it was bright moonlight or they could never have accomplished it without breaking their necks.

At last they reached the level.

Here Candle Creek flowed through the gorge with great swiftness.

There was a narrow shelf of rock running alongside of it.

The creek was on their right, while on the left rose a precipice at least two hundred feet high and almost perpendicular.

The place was a perfect fortress.

One determined man could have held it against a hundred, as Harry now remarked.

"Yes," replied Old King Brady, "for the location of a coiners' den it is all right."

"Then Bagnall's den is here?"

"It is."

"You have been in it?"

"I have looked into it. I am going to try and go in to-night."

"Good enough! It isn't guarded, then?"

"No. If it had been, probably I should not be alive now. That talk Bagnall made about two men holding us covered with rifles all the time was mere bluff. You have seen everybody there is in this camp. But here we are."

The place where Old King Brady paused did not differ from any other part of the ledge, except that right ahead a thick clump of bushes grew against the rocky wall.

The old detective paused just this side of the bushes, and reaching up to a sort of shelf, took down a piece of stone about as big as a man's head, revealing a hole behind.

A bright light immediately shot out upon the gorge.

"Heavens! What is that?" whispered Harry.

"Look!" said Old King Brady. "You need have no fear."

Harry peered through the hole, and immediately drew back.

"Governor, you are great!" he exclaimed. "You have tracked the coiners of Candle Creek to their secret den!"

CHAPTER VII.

OFF WITH THE QUEER.

"That's what's the matter, boy," replied Old King Brady. "We have run them to earth at last!"

"It's their queer shop, sure."

"Yes."

"But those thr   fellows whose names we have never even heard spoken once since we have been here, aren't they supposed to be in that cave?"

"They are supposed by Bagnall to be there, I have no doubt; but they are not. They have gone trout fishing up stream."

"Hello! You have been here before to-night, it would seem!"

"I have. But we must act quick. At any moment they may return."

"Where's the entrance?"

"Among those bushes somewhere. At least, that is where I saw them come out with their fishing poles."

"We'll tackle it. When did you make this discovery?"

"Two nights ago."

"Were they working then?"

"Yes."

"What makes the light?"

"They have a small electric battery inside there probably; but we must be on the move."

Old King Brady replaced the stone and went into the bushes.

He pushed them aside and discovered a low entrance to the cave.

The detectives had to get down upon their hands and knees in order to pass through it.

At the end they rose up in the darkness to find their way barred by a stout wooden door.

Old King Brady had produced his dark lantern, and he now began to fumble for his skeleton keys.

Trying the different keys in the bunch, he soon found one which opened the door.

A flood of light burst upon them as they threw it back.

They could see into the cave distinctly now.

The two large electric lights hanging down from the ceiling made everything plain.

"Never saw a better fitted up plant in my life," said Old King Brady in a whisper. "Harry, the chief of the Secret Service Bureau would go wild if he could see this."

"Have they been operating long?" asked Harry.

"About three years, the chief says; at least that is what he believes."

There was a large and well-built furnace at one end of the cave.

A pot hung suspended over it from a crane.

Pigs of silver and lead lay on the floor.

There was an iron table, provided with heavy rollers, for rolling out the strips of metal.

A small stamp was here, too, showing that not all the coins were cast.

A milling machine and other apparatus was scattered around.

"It's great!" said Old King Brady. "How in the world they ever managed to get all this stuff up here in the woods beats me."

"Shan't we go in and examine it more closely?" Harry asked.

"You do it," replied Old King Brady. "I'm going to have a look up the stream first. There's no telling when those fishermen may be on the move back again. It won't be safe for us to stay here for any length of time to-night."

The old detective slipped out, and Harry slipped into the coiners' den.

He only remained there a minute, however, before Old King Brady's warning whistle sounded.

Harry bounced out in a hurry.

Old King Brady seized him by the hand as he came crawling through the low opening and helped him to his feet.

"Hist! Quick, boy! They are coming!" he whispered.

Voices could be heard up the gorge.

The Bradys vanished.

A few minutes later they climbed up the rope ladder, gained the security of their room and tumbled into bed.

"Well," remarked Harry as he turned over to go to sleep.

"One thing is sure, governor; we are ready for business now."

"There will be something doing to-morrow if Mr. Bagnall is to be believed," Old King Brady replied.

He was right.

Next morning Mr. Bagnall appeared at the breakfast table for the first time since the detectives came into the camp.

He had not much to say until the meal was over, and then going into his own room, he returned with two suits of old clothes, one about Harry's size and the other just right for the old detective.

"Those are for you and Jack Jones, Peter," he said.

"You can go upstairs and put them on and be ready to start with Charlie Davis."

"Where do we go?" asked Old King Brady.

"Down to the shore to a place near the town of Harrington. A wagon has come up the new road you built to meet you. There is quite a load to be taken down the creek to where the driver camped out last night."

Old King Brady took the clothes, and followed by Harry, started upstairs.

"Hold on, Peter!" Bagnall called. "Don't you want to know what kind of a load you are going to carry down to the wagon?"

"Boss," said Old King Brady, turning, "that don't interest me one bit. You have used us white here, and I'm

not the man to pry into another's secrets, and my partner feels just the same way."

"Suppose it was a queer load?" said Bagnall, meaningly.

"Well?"

"What then?"

"Nothing then. I obey orders if I break owners. I should carry it to Harrington just the same."

"You old rascal! I guess you deserved your term in Thomaston all right. What do you think of these?"

"I've got him now," said Old King Brady to himself. "Brother Bagnall, if ever I succeed in snapping the handcuffs on you, state's prison stares you in the face."

It was a fact that Bagnall was completely fooled.

Still he did not go so far as to say one word about his secret coining plant.

He produced a handful of counterfeit half and quarter dollars and threw them down upon the table.

Old King Brady and Harry examined them carefully.

"They are the best I ever saw," declared the old detective. "They are the straight goods."

"They are ninety per cent. pure."

"I thought so. No trouble in shoving such goods as these."

"If you think so, I will give you a chance to try it later. Did you ever make any of this stuff?"

"Never."

"Merely a shover, eh?"

"That's all."

"Can you raise any cash?"

"Yes, lots."

"Where are your friends located?"

"Philadelphia. Our being nipped in Maine was only an accident."

And Old King Brady went on to name a few well-known coiners as his friends.

"Well," said Bagnall, "after we get through here for the winter, you and I will take a trip to Philadelphia and see what can be done. Change your clothes now and be ready for a start."

The detectives got into the clothes as quickly as possible.

When they came downstairs again Charlie Davis, who had been putting on his best clothes, too, told them that Bagnall was outside.

The detectives found him there, standing beside some twenty odd boxes about two feet square.

"There's a part of your load, Peter," he said. "The boys are bringing the rest down the gorge."

"Shall we get them right aboard the boat?" asked Old King Brady.

"Right now," was the reply. "It's all you can carry this trip and perhaps more. You will have to go down the creek twice."

It was tough work carrying the heavy boxes down over the rocks to the boat.

Old King Brady almost gave way under the strain.

Charlie Davis came down to the boat and loaded them in.

He called a halt at the eighteenth box, and declared they could carry no more.

The start down the creek in the boat was made soon after. Bagnall came down to see them off.

"Take care of my queer load, Peter!" he called as the boat shot down the stream.

As soon as they were out of hearing, Charlie Davis began to talk.

"Say, Peter; you're a lucky one," he said.

"What's the matter now?" asked Old King Brady. "How have I struck luck?"

"How? Why, you have got on the blind side of the boss completely. I wish I was you."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Do you suppose I want to stay in this blamed hole forever? Well, I don't, and, what's more, I don't intend to, as he will blame soon find out."

"Were you ever outside the State of Maine, Charlie?"

"Never; but that ain't a-saying that I don't want to be."

"I suppose you would like to try and spend a little of our queer load."

"That's what I mean to do. What I would have done long ago, if I could have raised the price. It's dead easy, hain't it?"

"Easy if you don't get caught."

"Like you fellers were?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, they wouldn't never trap me. I'm foxy, you bet."

"It's dangerous work shoving the queer."

"Not with such goods as these. You never saw such goods as these in all your life."

"I've seen a lot of the queer, Charlie."

"Yes, but you can't tell this from the genuine. It is almost genuine, and since we quit molding it and got that there stamping press the goods is better than ever. I've shoved 'em in Ellsworth and Cherryfield and Bangor lots of times. I don't get paid in nothing else."

"How much do you get, Charlie?"

"Two hundred a month, and I spend every dollar of it. Nobody never kicked yet. I tell you, the man don't live who could tell our goods from the real thing."

Old King Brady led Charlie on to considerable lengths and all the details of the business.

Now that Bagnall had confessed the true nature of his business to the detectives, Charlie Davis saw no reason for holding his tongue.

Being naturally a great talker, he let himself out to the full limit.

At last they reached the point where the new road began.

There was a large wagon and a good pair of horses here, in charge of the man who had come up Candle Creek in the canoe the evening before.

He helped to load the boxes on the wagon and declared that the horses could pull ten boxes more.

The detectives and Charlie Davis went back up the creek for the boxes.

About an hour later the wagon was all loaded and the start was made.

Before leaving the camp for the last time, Bagnall gave Old King Brady a sealed letter.

"You read that after you get well started, Peter," he said. "If you care to act upon it, I'll be your banker and start you off with five thousand dollars' worth of this new style of queer."

Mr. Bagnall gave Old King Brady a peculiar look as he said this.

"All right, boss," replied the detective, and he pocketed the letter without another word.

"That means murder!" Old King Brady said to himself. "Boss Bagnall has had enough of Charlie Davis' long tongue, if I am able to read the signs of the times."

The boxes, once loaded onto the wagon, the man in charge, whom Charlie called "Ed Foye," began to hitch up.

Old King Brady improved the opportunity to draw Harry aside.

"We are closing in," he whispered.

"That's what, governor; but there's one thing that strikes me a bit strange."

"What is that?"

"That we should be sent down to the shore with this wagon. What is the object of it, anyhow?"

"I think I can explain that," he said, and he told Harry about the letter Bagnall had given him.

"Have you read it yet?" questioned Harry.

"Not yet. I am going to read it now."

Old King Brady tore open the letter and read as follows:

"The man who can obey orders in everything without question or back talk is the man for me.

"In my business talking is the worst of sins.

"If a parrot talks too much, we wring his neck.

"Did you ever kill a parrot?"

"They say it's easy.

"One and one make two.

"If a parrot happens to die this trip, it will be appreciated.

"That will necessitate another death.

"The team belongs to J. S. Cronkite, of Harrington. No. 2 is a tramp and need hardly be accounted for, so long as the team gets home safe.

"Cronkite will introduce you to the schooner captain.

"You and Jack can go through to Boston and meet me there."

"This means murder!" exclaimed Harry.

"That's what it does," replied Old King Brady. "Murder, sure!"

CHAPTER VIII:

OLD KING BRADY PLAYS THE JOKER.

"What do you propose to do about it, governor?" Harry asked.

"Why," replied Old King Brady, "I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for that letter right now."

"And why?"

"It's my joker, my best card."

"I think I see your meaning."

"You will understand it better presently. That same joker is going to win us this game."

"Hey, yew fellers!" bawled Charlie Davis. "As soon as yew get through chinning, we will be on the move."

"Ready now," said Old King Brady.

They hurried to the wagon and climbed up on top of the load.

Charlie Davis sat down beside them.

Ed Foye had fixed the seat on the boxes and occupied it alone.

The ride over the new road the Bradys had built was a very rough one.

It was almost as bad when they struck the old wood road.

It took nearly two hours to work the team through to the turnpike.

"This wagon is too heavily loaded," Old King Brady remarked more than once.

"No, it hain't nothing of the sort," Charlie Davis asserted. "I know my business. This hain't the first time I've taken a load down to the shore," and he said the same thing over and over again.

Having struck the Mariaville road, things went better.

It was the main road through the Black Run and by no means a bad one.

They followed it five miles and then turned in on a horrible wood road, which led due south.

Ed Foye informed the detectives that this led to the shore, striking salt water at a point just about on the line between the towns of Harrington and Steuben.

It was all "up hill and down dale" now.

The wagon worked its way over stumps and logs and stones.

Every moment Old King Brady expected to see it tip over.

Once Harry called out that the wheel was off.

It wasn't, although Ed Foye, who got out to take a look, declared that the forward "ex" was badly bent.

"Geewillikin! that's a bad job!" growled Charlie Davis when they started again.

But it was a little easier going for a mile or so, and Charlie seemed to forget it, and began to talk again.

"Tell me about the way you fellers was caught," he said to Old King Brady.

The old detective gave him a great yarn.

Of course, it was the Bradys who had done the job.

This was said for a purpose, and it worked well.

"The Bradys!" sniffed Charlie. "Well, now, I could tell you something about them snoozers if I chose."

"What's that?" asked Old King Brady.

"Waal, you won't never gimme away?"

"Of course not."

"They were down here after us not two weeks ago."

Old King Brady pretended to be immensely frightened.

"Oh, yew needn't worry," chuckled Charlie. "We were good for 'em. Know what I did?"

"No. What?"

"They came by the M'r'ville stage. It broke down, and they put up at a house kept by a feller named Tom Maddock. Waal, sir, Tom has a darter, who is dead gone on me. She wants me to marry her and take her out of this Godforsaken country the worst kind of way."

"What has all that got to do with the Bradys?" Harry asked.

"Waal, it's got a lot to dew with 'em," drawled Charlie. "Boss Bagnall was onto 'em. 'Charlie, yew set old Tom's house afire an' burn them duffers up, an' I'll give yew ten thousand dollars in queer coin,' he says, 'an' you kin marry Mirandy and get deown to Boston right away.'"

"And did you do it?" asked Old King Brady.

"Well, I tried tew. We druv off and hid the team in the woods. Boss waited, while I sneaked back and piled brush against the gable end, where the detectives slept."

"Did Mirandy know about it?"

"Course she did."

"Willing to burn her own father's house up?"

"Sartin. She hates the old crank. He wuzn't into it, so she didn't care. But, blame them Bradys, they got onto it in time, an' I'll be hornswoggled if they didn't put the fire out."

"Where are they now? We don't want to run against them again."

"No danger. The Bradys is dead!"

"Dead!"

"Yes, dead," repeated Charlie. "Them's the fellers yew seen on the bridge; it's strange yew wouldn't recognize 'em, tew."

"You don't mean it! Well, you see, it was too dark to see their faces, and——"

Fortunately Old King Brady was spared the necessity of any further explanation.

All at once the off forewheel struck a stump.

The wagon gave a fearful lurch and the boxes shifted and over it went, throwing out all hands.

It was a wonder every one of them was not killed.

Fortunately, the horses stopped, and this alone saved their lives.

Nor was any one injured, but the bent "ex" was broken off short and the wheel lay on the ground.

Charlie Davis burst out in a torrent of "swear words," directed against Ed Foye.

"Now, you just hold your jaw!" retorted Foye. "I'm a-swearin' inside of me, and I'll dew all that's necessary. Keep that talk up, and I'll paste you in the eye!"

"It's all your fault!" growled Charlie, quieting down.

"'Tain't nuther. It's yourn. I warned ye an' so did the old man here, but you would load the wagon down with more'n we could carry, an' this is the result."

They kept it up for some moments longer.

Meanwhile Old King Brady stood aside, talking in whispers to Harry.

"I'm going to spring it on 'em now," he said. "The time to play the joker has come."

"Boys!" he called out, "look here; I want to talk poli-

tics to you. I'm an old man and I have had lots of experience. I want you to listen to what I have to say."

"I'll listen," said Ed Foye, who seemed to be a sensible sort of fellow. "I'm always ready to listen to any man, but it don't follow that I'm going to do as he says."

"I don't ask it," said Old King Brady. "If all had gone well with us, I should not have spoken until we reached the shore, but the way things have turned out, I think now is the time."

"Get ahead," said Ed Foye. "What have you got to say?"

"Is there any way of getting ahead? That's what I want to know first."

"None that I see with the load."

"And you, Charlie?"

"Course there hain't," replied Charlie. "We've got to get another wagon, that's all."

"So we are stuck?"

"That's what we are."

"Then I say, let us hide these boxes in the woods and go back for another load. Let's get all there is going in the cave. You can raise a wagon at Maddock's, Charlie, and when we get the second load, let's divide the whole business between ourselves, saying nothing to nobody and leaving nobody behind us to say nothing to us."

Charlie Davis' eyes opened wide.

Ed Foye gave a low whistle.

"You mean murder!" he said. "You mean for us to go back on Boss Bagnall; eh?"

His hand went behind him as though he would have drawn a revolver.

"Hold on!" cried Old King Brady; "you don't know all yet. Read this! Hear the proposition Boss Bagnall made to me and my partner; then tell me what you think about it."

Probably Charlie Davis could not read.

"You read the letter, Ed," he said. "This here doesn't surprise me as much as it does you."

Ed took the letter and read it aloud.

There was no "silent swearing" on the part of the driver this time. He just ripped right out.

Bagnall's ears must have burned about that time.

Charlie Davis had a lot to say, too.

His remarks would not look well in print.

Old King Brady had played his joker, and the game was as good as won.

"Now, boys," he exclaimed, "you see what sort of men we are, me and my partner. You see, too, what sort of a man we are working for. I know a lot of these boss queer makers. It is my belief that Bagnall means to close up this winter and to kill off every one who knows anything about his business."

"He'll never kill Almino, Fritz and Henry, then," put in Charlie. "Who'd make the coin?"

"Meaning the three fellows we have left behind us?"

"Yes. Who'd make the coin?"

"Does he never do any work himself?"

"Never."

"What do you think about the death of Sam Tinker and Tony now? Was it an accident, after all?"

"Gee! I doubt it. I'll bet you what you like he hired Tony to kill poor Sam, and Sam did him."

"There you are. They are both dead and——"

"Hold on, boss. I'm not so sure of that."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I told you I went back to see the bodies, and so I did, but I only found Tony's. Sam's was gone!"

"I think he was dead all right, though."

"Perhaps. But what became of his corpse?"

"Mightn't some animal have dragged it away?"

"A bear might."

"Are there bears in these woods?"

"There be, but they are scarce."

"Put it down to a bear, then. But why didn't you so report?"

"Because I was tired of wood cutting. I wanted you fellows to stay and build the road."

"I see. Well, we built it and we ran the queer coin over it, and here we are."

"It's blamed tough," said Ed Foye. "I wouldn't never have believed this; Bagnall kept holding out hopes to me for next year. It's blamed little I've got but of the business so far, and that's right."

"And it's blamed little you ever will get out of it through him," said Old King Brady. "You had better join in with my plan."

"Just what is your plan?"

"Is Bagnall rich?"

"As mud!" broke in Charlie. "At least so they say."

"Who says?"

"Them coiners."

"What are their other names?"

"Don't know. Almino, Fritz and Henry are the only names I ever heard them called."

"Your plan, Peter; your plan!" cried Ed Foye, impatiently.

"To sneak back, capture Bagnall and hold him prisoner for ransom. If Almino, Fritz and Henry won't join in with us, we will hold them, too."

"Waal, they won't," said Charlie. "I stand for capturing all hands, doing them up and swiping the whole business for ourselves."

"I'm with you!" added Ed.

"Good!" said Old King Brady. "So are we; but I think the ransom scheme is the best."

"We'll think of that," said Charlie. "What I want is the dough. If I could strike Boston with all the stuff we have in hand now I'd soon make my pile."

"Right!" said Old King Brady. "But how about your girl?"

"She would go with us. She's ready to light out with me any time."

"Good again! Is it settled then?"

"So far as I'm concerned."

"Count me right in," said Ed.

So much for Old King Brady's joker.

Bagnall little dreamed what a weapon he had put into the detectives' hands.

There was some further talk, and then the two men were ready to act.

It was decided that "Peter," on account of his age and experience, should be the leader in the affair.

The boxes were carefully stowed away in the woods and buried under the dead leaves.

The wagon was dragged to the side of the road and left there.

Old King Brady and Harry mounted one of the horses, while Ed and Charlie rode the other.

Thus fixed, they started to return to Candle Creek.

It looked very bad for Bagnall about that time.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL ON ACCOUNT OF A GIRL.

"Governor, things are moving," said Harry as they rode on over the wood road leading back to Candle Creek.

"Decidedly," replied Old King Brady. "But we are by no means out of the woods yet."

"In more senses than one."

"In every sense. Of course, we have got to take Bagnall and the coiners alive."

"We must, or our reputation with the Secret Service Bureau is gone."

"Exactly."

"What about these two fellows?"

"Don't care a rap whether we get them or not."

"And this man Cronkite at Harrington and the schooner captain?"

"They go for nothing. Our evidence will convict them. They are known quantities. They can be captured at any time."

"But we don't even know the name of the schooner."

"What of that. Harrington is not such an important port but what every schooner coming in there will be fully known."

"Of course, of course. Then there is that confounded girl!"

"I agree with you, Harry. In the girl lies our greatest danger."

"She'll know us sure."

"I fear it. Still, she may not in these clothes."

"Then you have no definite plan of action laid out?"

"It is impossible to form one. We have just got to take matters as they come."

The detectives rode behind the other horse, and they had a chance to continue their conversation until they reached Candle Creek.

"Can't we ride directly to the hut, Charlie?" Old King Brady asked.

"We can," replied Charlie, "but it's rough going."

"Didn't you drive Bagnall there? You said so."

"Yes, but that is on the other side of the creek. It's too deep to get the horses across here."

"I never saw your team."

"We have a barn in the woods, at the foot of the hill. You weren't never there. We'll go up in the boat and stop short of the rocks. That's the best way."

They all went aboard, Harry and Charlie Davis pulling the boat up Candle Creek.

It was now drawing on towards the close of the day.

Ed Foye suggested that they wait until dark, and as Charlie seemed to favor the idea too, Old King Brady agreed.

A landing was accordingly made about a mile short of the log hut.

Here the boat was drawn up into the woods and hidden.

The men sat around under the trees smoking until night came on.

At last the start was ordered, and they climbed up the rocks to the rear of the hut.

"Well," said Old King Brady, halting as soon as he caught sight of it, "we must come to some conclusion now. How about the ransom scheme?"

"I favor it," said Ed Foye. "I'm no man killer and I'm too old to begin the business now."

"I say, kill the whole lot of 'em!" growled Charlie. "We haven't no use for 'em. What we want is the queer, for it is just as good as the real thing."

"We could keep them prisoners in the cave," said Young King Brady.

"What do you know about the cave?" demanded Charlie quickly. "You haven't never been there."

"Of course not. I've got ears, though, and you have done a deuce of a lot of talking since we started out."

"Well, that's right, too. Say, the cave is a good place to box 'em up in. I could fix it so they wouldn't never get out."

"Do it then," said Ed Foye. "No luck will come of murder."

"Right," said Harry.

"Hain't that so, Peter?" Ed asked.

"My experience has shown me that it is so, gentlemen," replied Old King Brady.

"Waal, you all seem to be against me," said Charlie; "so I suppose I've got to give in."

"You agree then?" asked Old King Brady.

"Yes."

"Settled, and I'm glad of it. Now, about the best way to capture them. Where do you suppose they are now?"

"Most likely they are all at the cave."

"We must make sure. How do we stand in the matter of arms?"

"I'm well fixed," said Ed; "two revolvers and a whacking old knife."

"And you, Charlie?"

"Same here," said Charlie. "As for yew fellers, I suppose you hain't got nothing at all."

"There you are wrong. Boss Bagnall made each of us a present of a revolver just before we started out."

"To do us up with, I suppose?"

"That's what."

"Peter, you're a blame good fellow. I appreciate this thing."

"You can just bet I do," said Ed. "Another would have done us up and stood in with the boss."

"I'm not that sort of a man at all," replied Old King Brady. "But don't waste time throwing bouquets at me. We want to act."

"Well, boss, you're the leader. What's to be done first?"

"The first thing is to locate our game. You know the house best, Charlie. Move on down there and let us know how the case stands."

"All right. But let Ed come with me. I don't want to run the risk of meeting Boss Bagnall alone."

"Very good. Go on, boys; but don't be long."

The two men stole off towards the house.

"Governor, you ought not to have let them go," said Harry, anxiously, as soon as they were out of hearing. "Goodness knows what trouble it is liable to bring upon us."

"I know it," replied Old King Brady.

"What in the world did you do it for then?"

"Had to. The whole success of our scheme depends upon these men feeling confidence in us."

"Well, I suppose you are right; but I feel as if there was trouble in the wind."

"You do?"

"I certainly do. I can't help it."

"Strange, but I feel the same way."

"For us to sail in and capture Bagnall and the coiners with no more trouble than we have had, seems too good to be true."

"It does, and yet——. But here they come back again."

"Nobody there," reported Charlie Davis as they drew near.

"You were in the house?" Old King Brady asked.

"Yes, I was all over the place. There's nobody there."

"Then they must be in the cave."

"Unless they have gone up the creek after trout."

"Do they often go fishing at night?"

"Very often."

"Shall we move on the cave?"

"I'm ready."

"And so are we. You'll have to be the guide. How do we go?"

"There are two ways into the cave."

"Yes?"

"Yes. One way is to go up the gorge. That's the main entrance. Then there is a way of getting down into it from the top of the first rise of the hill."

"Which is the best?"

"If they are there at work, we have got to take the second."

"Why?"

"Because we could not get in at the first without breaking the door down, and if we did that, Boss Bagnall would blow us to blazes."

"They are heavily armed in there?"

"You bet they are. He never opens the door without having his revolver cocked and ready."

"Suppose we just go to the door and ask for admittance, telling them that the wagon has broken down and we had to come back? While we are talking, we can jump on him."

"Yaas," drawled Charlie, "that sounds fine; but it wouldn't work. You don't happen to know that neither Ed nor me was ever supposed to have been in the cave. We hain't allowed in there, and to do that would bring us into quick trouble, sure."

"Then how did you know about the other way?"

"I said supposed, Peter."

"Then you have been in?"

"Yes, many a time on the dead quiet. It was this way: Sam Tinker discovered that cave. Bagnall used to come up here fishing summers, and Sam was always his guide. Sam showed him the cave, and they got very thick. At last Bagnall told him what his business was, and Sam agreed to go into it. So Bagnall leased the stream, and they started up the queer coin shop."

"And you came in through Sam?"

"I did. I was teamster first. I brought up most of the machinery from the shore. Then Ed took hold, and——"

"And here we are wasting time," said Ed. "We must go in the back way, of course."

"It seems to me so," added Old King Brady.

"It is so," replied Charlie; "but, first off, you want to have a look at the place."

"How can we do that without going in?"

"Oh, through my peep hole. I found where the cave was and I managed to break away a bit of rock big enough to get a look inside of it. Come on. I'll show you. If they happen to be off fishing, we won't go into the cave at all, but will just lay for them when they come down."

"All right," said Old King Brady. "You are leader now, Charlie; so lead on."

Of course, Charlie led them up the gorge to the bushes.

The place was pretty dark, for the moon had not risen yet.

Charlie stopped and removed the stone.

No light was seen within this time.

Charlie seemed surprised.

"Hello! What's the matter here?" he whispered. "The place ought to be lit up."

"How do they light it?" asked Old King Brady.

"He's got an electric battery."

"Perhaps they turned it off before they went fishing."

"They don't never turn it off. 'Tisn't that kind of a battery. But I don't know nothing about it. More'n likely the blame thing has broke down."

"Where is the entrance to the cave?"

"Right ahead, among them bushes."

"I'd like to tackle it all right."

"Don't think of it. We had better get out of the gorge. They may be listening to every word we say."

"Nothing doing, nothing doing," said Ed Foye, impatiently. "All talk and no cider, it seems to me."

"Patience," said Old King Brady. "We are going to

tackle the back way now. We shall get down to business all right by and by."

Charlie led the way back along the gorge.

They had not gone far before the sound of footsteps other than their own made themselves heard.

"Hist!" breathed Old King Brady. "Some one coming, boys!"

They stopped and listened.

The sound could still be heard, but whoever made it trod very lightly on the stones.

"Blame that echo!" breathed Charlie. "I can't tell whether it's up or down."

Just then the moon rose above the top of the gorge, shedding its silvery light into the dismal hole.

"Gee!" gasped Ed; "a girl!"

Coming towards them, along the gorge, was the one person the Bradys most dreaded.

It was Miranda Maddock!

"B'gosh, it's Mirandy!" Charlie Davis exclaimed.

At the same instant Tom Maddock's daughter caught sight of her lover.

"Oh, Charlie!" she screamed, and came running towards him.

The Bradys stood their ground, for there was nothing else to do.

"Great snakes, Mirandy. What you come snooping round here for?" demanded Charlie, ungraciously.

"Oh, I've quarreled with father and I've run away!" cried Miranda, throwing her arms around her lover's neck.

"Keep off!" snarled Charlie. "None of that. Hain't got no time for love makin' now. I——. What yew staring at? See a ghost?"

"It's them!" cried Miranda, pointing at the detectives. "Charlie, are yew crazy? Don't yew know who them men be?"

"Who? What? Say, who do yew mean?" demanded Charlie.

"Them's the Bradys, that's all!" replied Miranda, quickly. "Them's the detectives what I told you was dead!"

CHAPTER X.

PRISONERS IN THE COINERS' DEN.

"Stand your ground, Harfy! Leave it all to me," Old King Brady whispered when Miranda first appeared.

"What's the matter with that girl? Is she crazy?" he now exclaimed aloud.

Charlie Davis had wheeled about and was staring in Old King Brady's face.

There was a vicious look in his eyes, which was anything but pleasant.

Ed Foye stood still and never said a word.

"It's no such a thing!" screamed Miranda. "I know them, in spite of their different clothes, and if you wasn't a fool, Charlie Davis, you'd a knowed them, tew."

"You had better look after your girl, Charlie," said Old King Brady, quietly. "She's sounding the alarm pretty lively. There's going to be trouble here!"

"So I say!" growled Ed. "We'd better get a screech owl and a bobcat and let 'em go to fighting right here in the gorge."

"I dunno what to say," said Charlie, perplexed. "Mirandy's usually right, but this time I think she must be wrong."

"I am right; I know it!" cried the girl. "I can't be mistaken! I could never forget that young fellow's bold, bad eye!"

"Well, that's the first time I ever heard that my eyes were bad!" laughed Young King Brady; "but one thing is certain. I never laid eyes, good or bad, on this young woman before."

"Davis," said Old King Brady, "you have had near two weeks to study us in. Unless you have lost your memory altogether, you ought to know whether we are the men you saw at the house of this girl's father or not."

"Well, I don't know," replied Charlie. "It was so blame dark that I couldn't tell exactly what they looked like."

"There you be," persisted Miranda. "I seen 'em in the light."

"Yer about the same ages, that's sure," continued Charlie. "Blame me if I know what to think."

"Davis," said Old King Brady sternly, "don't be a fool. You know what sort of clothes we had on when we came in here. Do convicts' clothes grow on bushes down in this part of the State of Maine?"

"No, by gaul, they don't!"

"Then again, suppose we were the Bradys, what sort of men would you take us to be?"

"Blame dangerous ones. I've heard enough about the Bradys from the boss."

"Men to stand around and argue with you? Why, man, dear, I tell you if I was really Old King Brady, the detective, the handcuffs would have been on your wrists long ago, and on Ed Foye's, too."

"That's so," said Ed. "They have had every chance."

"Sis, I guess you must be mistaken," drawled Charlie.

"Oh, I be, be I?" snapped Miranda. "Just you keep a-believing it, and yew'll soon find out!"

"Confound ye, what did yew want to come here for, anyhow, kicking up a muss?" Charlie growled.

"Seems as if I was needed here all right, Charlie Davis."

"You're not needed and you're not wanted, what's more."

"Well, I like that!"

"Anyhow, twarn't sartain that them fellers was the Bradys. It was only Boss Bagnall's notions, and he might have been wrong."

"Come on, Ed," said Old King Brady. "We'll go on out of the gorge and leave them to fight it out between themselves."

"So I say," growled Ed Foye.

"Hold on!" cried Charlie. "Where'll I see yew again, in case I want to find yew?"

"We'll wait at the house," said Old King Brady. "I

guess, after all, we had better give our plan up and report the break down to Boss Bagnall."

"Not by a blamed sight!"

"Well, brother, I can't train with both sides. I dealt fair with you, and it's more than you can say to me."

"Come on, come on, Peter!" cried Young King Brady.

And, followed by Ed Foye, the detectives walked away.

The Bradys had won for the time being.

Ed was convinced, at all events.

"That's always the way when a woman comes to stick her finger in the pie," he growled. "I wish to gracious I knew where the back entrance to the cave was, and we'd let Charlie go to blazes."

"It's too bad," said Old King Brady; "but I don't care. I'm not afraid to face Boss Bagnall. We couldn't have gone ahead, anyway, with the broken wagon. There was nothing else for it but to come back."

"Do you mean to give it up?" asked Ed, anxiously.

"Don't see what else we can do."

"Suppose Charlie accused you of being the Bradys to Boss Bagnall?"

"Well," flashed Harry, "I guess we can fight. Peter is a dead shot. We are both armed. Perhaps, in that case, we might be able to carry out the plan after all, if you will stand by us, Ed."

"Which I will, you can bet," replied Ed. "But here they come."

They had passed out of the gorge and were just starting to climb down over the rocks, when Charlie Davis' whistle was heard.

"Wait," said Old King Brady. "Let's hear what he has to say."

Charlie came up alone. Miranda was trailing on behind.

"I was dead wrong," he said. "Forget it."

"You are sure you know your own mind now?" Old King Brady asked.

"Yes. Mirandy don't know nothing at all about it. I'm satisfied of that."

"The girl has had a row with her father and is excited."

"Yaas, that's what's the matter with her. Don't say another word."

"All right. Do we go on to carry out our plan?"

"Sure."

"And the girl?"

"Waal, she has to go along with us. That's all."

"Why does she have to?"

"For a blame good reason, Peter. She won't stay behind."

"Show us the way up the hill. It's your funeral about Mirandy, not ours," put in Ed Foye.

Charlie started up over the rocks above the entrance to the gorge.

It was a terrible climb of at least two hundred feet.

Miranda kept protesting that she could never do it, and calling to Charlie to help her.

Charlie, however, paid no attention to her at all.

At last they reached a narrow strip of level land, which marked the end of the first rise.

"How far now?" asked Old King Brady.

"Only a little way," replied Charlie. "Come along."

"Wait for me! wait for me!" screamed Miranda, who had not come up yet.

"If something isn't done to stop the squawking of that jay bird, we shall all be in the soup!" exclaimed Old King Brady, angrily.

"Come on, gosh blame you!" cried Charlie, turning back.

He seized Miranda's hand and pulled her roughly up on the level.

"I want you to tie up that long tongue of yours, Mirandy Maddock!" he snarled. "If yew don't, I'll make yew, that's all!"

"Now, don't yew be so cross, Charlie," the girl whimpered. "Yew'll be sorry for this bime bye."

"I'm sorry now you ever came here."

"Didn't I come to warn you that the Bradys had put the fire out? Oh, I guess they know all about that well enough!"

"Of course we do," laughed Harry.

"Why, certainly," said Old King Brady.

"And why not, seeing that I told 'em all about it?" Charlie cried.

"Charlie Davis, yew are the biggest fool in the State of Maine!" snapped Miranda. "The idea of telling a thing like that tew strangers who could use it against yew, even if they hain't the Bradys, which I say they be."

Old King Brady sat down on a rock.

"I give it up!" he exclaimed. "Unless that girl's mouth can be shut and kept shut, I just won't go on!"

"Mirandy, yew go home!" cried Charlie, speaking to the girl just as if she had been a dog.

"I won't! You hain't got no right to talk to me like that!" Miranda screamed.

"Go home! Get out!" roared Charlie, thoroughly aroused at last.

Miranda flew at him and slapped his face.

The next they knew, Charlie had her by the shoulders and was running her down the hill.

"She'll spoil our pie all right, governor!" whispered Harry.

"I'm afraid so," answered Old King Brady. "Still we can do nothing about it."

The quarrelsome lovers were out of sight now, but Miranda's screams could still be heard.

At length they died away, and after a little while Charlie returned alone.

"She won't trouble us no more," he said.

"You haven't killed her, I hope?" said Old King Brady.

"No, no. I've shoved her off, that's all. She'll go home."

"You have a blame fine way of handling a girl," laughed Ed. "One would think she was a dog."

"Sometimes I think she dunno so much as a decent dog," growled Charlie. "Come on, all. We are almost there now."

They were and they were not.

Charlie soon made it plain that he did not know so much about the place as he pretended.

He could not find the entrance to the cave.

He hunted everywhere.

Ed Foye hunted on his own account.

The Bradys pulled away and hunted on theirs.

"Governor, we are losing time to beat the band," said Harry. "No good will come of this."

"I know it," replied Old King Brady, "but how is it going to be helped?"

"I don't believe he was ever in the cave from this end."

"I think he was, Harry. What has happened is that Bagnall has changed the appearance of things by rolling these stones around."

Old King Brady's idea was reasonable.

The ground where they were was strewn all over with boulders, big and little.

It was evident to Old King Brady that some of them had recently been removed from their beds.

He called Charlie's attention to this, and suggested that they turn over every boulder that had been so removed.

This they did, and the result was in a few minutes the discovery was made.

As they rolled over one big boulder, whose position had recently been changed, there beneath it was a round opening, which led down between two walls of ledge rock.

"That's it!" cried Charlie. "That's the back entrance to the cave!"

"We will start exploring right away," said Old King Brady.

"Light your lantern now."

Charlie had brought the lantern along with him from the broken wagon.

He lighted it and led the way down through the opening.

It was a rough descent over broken rock, down to a depth of about a hundred feet, when they came to a long, narrow chamber, arched overhead.

It was the most peculiarly formed cave Old King Brady had ever been in.

It seemed to have been formed by a vast piece of the ledge dropping down into some opening still lower.

The floor sloped downward with a gradual descent.

"Now, here we be," said Charlie, flashing his lantern about. "This here chamber gets narrower and narrower as yew go down. At the end is a door, which leads right into the queer shop. Of course, it is all one cave, but it widens out there, and Boss Bagnall cut this part off from the rest by putting that there door across the narrowest part."

"We want to make for the door," said Old King Brady. "I think I can open it, and then we will lay for them and make the rush when they come in."

"Suppose they are there now?" asked Harry.

"We must find out before we open the door. Leave all that to me."

The walk to the door was not a long one.

Old King Brady made Charlie turn down his lantern to a mere glimmer as they approached it.

"Is there a peep hole here?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," was the reply.

"There's the keyhole, though; I'll tackle that."

Old King Brady advanced towards the door.

He had scarcely taken two steps when it was suddenly thrown open, and light flooded the cave.

Crack! Crack!

Two shots rang out behind!

Out from the coiners' den Boss Bagnall came dashing, the girl, Miranda, close behind him.

"There they be! Them's the detectives!" she screamed.

"I'm shot!" yelled Charlie Davis.

"Charlie! Charlie!" screamed Miranda. "Oh, don't kill my beau!"

Bagnall fired at Old King Brady before the detective had time to draw, while at the same instant the man Almino felled Harry with a stunning blow on the back of the head.

Old King Brady ducked to dodge the bullet.

His foot slipped, and he fell flat on his face.

Quick as lightning, Bagnall jumped on him and held him down.

"Hold on, boys! Don't fire!" he shouted. "To be simply shot is too easy a death for these two scoundrels! Tie up the young fellow! I'll manage this one. We will chuck 'em in the furnace and roast 'em alive!"

It was over in a minute!

As Young King Brady feared, Miranda spoiled the pie.

Spurned by her lover, the girl had betrayed them, and the Bradys found themselves prisoners in the coiners' den!

CHAPTER XI.

FACING A FEARFUL FATE.

"Now then, Mr. Old King Brady, since you and your partner are so curious to see my queer coin shop, you shall have that pleasure. I propose to show you just how we do it. Your curiosity shall be gratified. You shall know all."

Mr. Bertram Bagnall was the speaker.

He stood against the coining press, coolly smoking a cigar.

Before him, with their hands securely tied behind them and the strong rope fastened to a heavy wooden post which had been wedged in from floor to ceiling as a support for the roof of the cave, stood the Bradys in as bad a plight as they had ever been in.

They were entirely at the mercy of the leader of the Candle Creek gang of coiners.

It was enough to make them wish that they had never ventured on the Black Run.

And, what was worse, there seemed to be no possibility of help coming to the detectives from any source.

Here they were in the depths of a Maine forest, miles and miles from the nearest house.

Where could help possibly come from, unless it dropped down from the skies?

Charlie Davis was dead!

He had been shot through the heart.

The three coiners were outside the door when the Bradys and their companions came down through the cave.

Hiding in the shadows, they lay in wait for their victims.

And yet their plan had not been all a success.

Ed Foye had escaped.

Ed was the last one to come, and the instant Bagnall opened the door and the light flooded the cave, he took to his heels and ran like a deer.

The coiner, Henry, instantly gave chase; but he was a large, clumsy man, and Ed had no trouble in outdistancing him.

Bagnall swore horribly when he came back and reported that the teamster had given him the slip.

When he cooled down, he sent two of the coiners to close up the back entrance to the cave, which they did by rolling the boulder over it, returning by the front way.

All this time Miranda was screaming wildly and making a terrible time over her dead lover.

"Take that girl to the house and lock her up!" ordered Bagnall when the coiners returned.

"Hold on!" he cried when they started to obey him. "First chuck Davis' body into the creek."

It was an unwise order.

Bagnall came in for his dose then.

With a wild scream, Miranda made a rush for him.

"You said you wouldn't hurt him!" she yelled, "and now you have killed him! I'll kill you!"

She threw herself upon him, scratched his face and tore his hair out by the roots.

It took the united strength of Almino and Fritz to pull her away.

"Take her off now!" thundered Bagnall. "Was there ever such a cat? Take her to the house. Tie her up. Lock her up. She must never leave the camp alive!"

So much for the treachery of an angry woman!

She had betrayed her lover and fallen into the worst kind of trouble herself.

It was after the two coiners had dragged Miranda off that Bagnall turned to the imprisoned detectives and addressed Old King Brady in the words with which this chapter opens.

To his remarks Old King Brady made no reply.

He had come to one conclusion.

The longer he could delay matters, the better their chance of escape.

And yet it must be admitted that Old King Brady had but little hope that they would ever escape.

"Why don't you speak?" demanded Bagnall. "There's two of you. Have neither one of you anything to say?"

"If you want talk, I'll give it to you," said Old King Brady then, "although I must confess I see very little use in talking to a madman, Mr. Bagnall, and that's what I believe you are."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bagnall, fiercely. "You are rather bold, Mr. Detective, considering how entirely you and your son are in my power."

"This young man is no more my son than I am the person you believe me to be."

"Don't lie, Brady!"

"Why do you call me Brady?"

"Because you are Brady."

"You believe it simply on the word of a half-crazy girl, who in a fit of pique at her lover, brings all this trouble upon us."

"I can see it for myself. I might have guessed. I was a fool that I didn't recognize you two as my fellow passengers on the Mariaville stage."

"I know nothing about the Mariaville stage nor your fellow passengers," replied Old King Brady with an air of honest innocence, which he well knew how to assume. "You are simply jumping at conclusions, boss, and that is all there is about it. If you would cool down and listen to our story, you would understand this matter a little better than you do."

"That's right, Mr. Bagnall," added Harry. "Peter is giving it to you straight. You are on the wrong track altogether, if you will only believe what I say."

Bagnall seemed to weaken.

The fact was he did not feel quite sure of his ground.

He had ordered a search of the Bradys for firearms, and it was hastily made without getting all the revolvers the detectives carried by any means.

Henry, who made it, did not find out that they wore two suits of clothes.

"Well, you can talk, it seems," Bagnall said at last.

"Tell your story. Let's hear what you have to say, or, rather, I'll question you. We shall get at the facts sooner so."

"That's right," said Old King Brady. "If you only knew the facts, you would set us free at once."

"You hold your jaw!" snapped Bagnall. "This is the young fellow's proposition. When I want to hear from you, I'll let you know."

"There's nothing you can ask me that I won't tell you," said Harry. "Now, what is it you want to know?"

"How came you fellows back here, if you are not the Bradys as I suppose?"

"It's very simple. The wagon was overloaded and broke down in the woods. We could do nothing with it, so we returned."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"Where did it happen?"

"Just after we left the Mariaville road and struck south."

"You didn't tell me this before."

"What chance have we had to tell you?"

"Not much, that's a fact. What you say is all right, as far as it goes, but when you came back here, what right had you to come snooping around the cave?"

"Boss," answered Harry impressively, "we hadn't nothing at all to do with that. We just did as we were told."

"Who told you, Davis?"

"That's what. We couldn't find any one at the house, and he said we were to come up here."

"He must have been drunk then. He wasn't allowed in this place. He was never in here in his life."

"I don't know anything about that. We followed his orders, that's all."

"Had he been drinking?"

"I expect he had. He kinder acted that way. We didn't get any of it, though. First he led us up the gorge and then he changed his mind and took us up the hill and brought us in through a hole under a big stone."

"The scoundrel must have been snooping around here before. I never would have believed it."

"I don't know anything about that."

"Did he tell you what sort of a shop this was?"

"Yes, he did. He was talking about it all the time. From what you said to Peter before we started, I supposed it was all right. I never dreamed that we were going to get ourselves into a scrape like this."

"It would have been all right if it hadn't been for this girl," Old King Brady ventured to remark.

Bagnall did not call him down this time. He seemed to be a good deal impressed.

"Where did you meet the girl?" he asked.

"Just as we were coming out of the gorge," replied Young King Brady. "She accused us of being the Bradys. Of course it is all nonsense. Just because Peter happens to be an old man and I a young one, we have to stand for that."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, at first Charlie was inclined to listen to her, but after a bit he gave up the notion and ordered her off. She followed us up the hill and kept on making trouble. They got into a fight and he drove her away. She swore to be revenged, and I suppose went and looked you up and told her story, and this is the result."

"That is just what happened. Then you mean to say that you followed Charlie Davis here in perfect good faith?"

"That's just exactly what I mean to say. I never was more surprised in my life than when we were attacked. You're making a big mistake, boss. You are, indeed."

"I don't know about that," said Bagnall, puffing at his cigar. "I'm a man who takes no chances. It's dead against the rule for any one to come in here without my permission. Now, then, old man, what have you got to say?"

"Jack has said it all for me," replied Old King Brady. "I haven't one word to add."

"Not one?" demanded Bagnall, fiercely. "Not one?"

"No, not me."

"How about that letter I gave you. If you had acted upon it and come back here without Davis and Foye, it would have been all right."

"Boss Bagnall," said Old King Brady impressively, "I should have acted upon it, but when the wagon broke down and all that coin had to be left in the woods, I thought that probably you had rather have me wait until another wagon could be got and the boxes carried to the shore."

"By Jove, you two fellows put up a good story!" ex-

claimed Bagnall, fretfully. "Blame me, if I know what to believe."

"Believe the story," said Old King Brady. "You could not put your finger on two better men for your purpose."

"But, if you are lying—if you are the Bradys?"

"There's no use arguing on that point. If you are fool enough to believe we are the Bradys, we can't help it; that's all."

For some time Bagnall paced the floor in silence.

At last he threw away his cigar, exclaiming:

"Well, I'll talk to the boys and see what they say about it. Our business is a dangerous one, as you well know, whether you are the Bradys or whether you are what you claim to be. We take no chances. If they think you are the Bradys, you must die the death which we swore when we located here should be the fate of any detective who tracked us to the Black Run. I cannot quarrel with my coiners, for they understand the working end of the business and I don't. I admit that I now have my doubts about you being the Bradys; but they must be the ones to decide."

"And, in the meantime, are we to be left tied up in this uncomfortable position?" Harry asked.

"That's what you are. I can take no chances, but I will go up to the house now and talk it over with the boys."

Bagnall left the cave by the gorge door then and was gone some time.

"Try and pull your hands out of your bonds, Harry," said Old King Brady as soon as he had gone.

This was Young King Brady's old trick.

No man living could double his hands up into smaller compass than Harry.

Many and many was the time he had been able to slip his bonds.

He could not do it now, however.

He had tried it again and again. He tried while he was talking to Bagnall, but he was too tightly tied.

"Can't be done, governor," he exclaimed. "I have given it up."

"Then I fear we are lost."

"It looks that way. What do you suppose will be our fate?"

"You heard what was said about the furnace," replied Old King Brady.

"Do you really think they would burn us alive?"

"I believe it. I never saw a man with a more cruel eye than this Bagnall. I believe him capable of doing that very thing."

After a time Bagnall returned, and the three coiners with him.

"Now, Almino," he said to one of the coiners when they had locked the gorge door behind them, "it is for you to decide the fate of these fellows. Get out your picture of the Bradys, and see if it fills the bill."

"We are lost!" thought Old King Brady, and his heart sank.

Bagnall kept on talking.

"You see, Almino keeps a collection of pictures of detectives," he explained. "He has the Bradys among the rest.

We propose to compare your faces and see how they fill the bill."

Almino went to a closet, built up in one corner of the cave.

Here he took out a scrap album, in which many photographs and newspaper pictures had been pasted.

He turned over the leaves hurriedly and exclaimed:

"Here they are!"

It was a cheap picture of the Bradys from an illustrated paper which he held up.

It needed no expert to see the close resemblance.

"They are surely the Bradys, boss!" cried Almino.

"Yes," said Bagnall. "There can be no doubt about it. That is who they are."

And the detectives never said a word, for there was nothing to say.

"Do they die the death, boys?" asked Bagnall.

"They do," replied Almino, firmly.

"They must," added Fritz.

"They shall, for our safety depends upon it!" Henry declared.

"Settled!" said Bagnall. "Now, then, you Bradys, hear the judgment of the court. You are to be kept as you are till we get ready to kill you, and then you are to be plunged, head first, into the furnace alive. We have sworn that such should be the fate of any detective who tracked us to the Black Run, and there can be no appeal. Boys, get to work. Show these spies how we do it before they die!"

It was a terrible ordeal for the detectives.

Any appeal for mercy they saw would be useless.

Hope vanished.

The Bradys found themselves facing a fearful fate!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

All through that night the Bradys remained tied to the post, watching the coiners of Candle Creek make their queer coin.

Not a word was spoken to them nor did they speak to any one, for what would have been the use?

At last morning came and the body of Charlie Davis was taken from the inner cave and thrown into the creek, to be carried off down that swiftly flowing stream.

Then Bagnall and his men left the cave and started for the hut to get breakfast.

"We shall be back in an hour, Brady," he said to the old detective. "Then you will see your finish. So, if you have any praying to do, it will give you plenty of time."

Before leaving the cave, Almino built up a roaring fire in the furnace, piling in short sticks of hard wood to make a bed of glowing coals, he calmly informed the detectives.

"Harry, this is a terrible business," said Old King Brady, after they had departed. "I wish with all my heart I had never brought you here."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, governor. It was all in the line of our work."

"But death seems certain."

"It is no worse for you than it is for me."

"If I could save your life by giving up my own, I would gladly do it."

"I believe you, my boy; I believe you. But it cannot be done, and it would not be the right thing to do if it could. I was just thinking—— Ha! what noise was that?"

"Governor, it was some one behind the door of the inner cave."

"That's what. I'm sure of it."

"So am I. Heard it distinctly."

"All seems quiet now, though."

"Listen!"

"Maybe rats. Sound like a rat gnawing."

"Thunder! It is surely some one cutting away the lock with a jackknife."

And for the next twenty minutes the Bradys stood listening to these sounds, with hope rising in their hearts.

At last the blade of a knife came through the door.

"Who is there?" called Old King Brady.

"Me!" came the answer, in a hoarse, hissing whisper.

"Who are you?" called the detective again.

There was an attempt to answer.

The words were lost in a violent fit of coughing.

"I—I can't speak!" was gasped out. And the cutting began again.

The Bradys watched the movement of the knife blade with wildly beating hearts.

It did its work rapidly, now that it was through the door.

"Oh, if Bagnall will only keep away a few moments longer!" Young King Brady exclaimed.

"He will; I'm sure he will," replied Old King Brady.

"Have hope, Harry. That's half the battle, after all!"

At the same instant something fell and struck hard upon the stone floor.

It was the lock!

Instantly the door flew open, and a dreadful-looking object slid into the room.

It had once been a man, but it was now a mere shadow.

The face was deathly pale, the eyes fixed and staring, the clothes, which were dirty and bedraggled, hung about him like bags.

"Sam Tinker!" gasped Old King Brady. "The dead come to life again!"

"Yes, it's me!" breathed the man in a voice so low that the detectives could scarcely distinguish the words. "But for you, I would indeed have been dead."

"My poor friend! How did we help you?" Old King Brady asked.

"You turned me over on my back and stopped the flow of blood," gasped Tinker. "Then you left your rifle and fishpole and grub behind you in the bushes. You thought me dead, but I wasn't. I managed to crawl away into the woods, and those traps of yours kept me alive. Well, I'm here to save you. I met Ed Foye down Candle Creek, and he told me how it was with you. I owe my life to you, so I

made up my mind to save you from that black-whiskered devil if I could."

"For which I bless you," replied Old King Brady. "Rely upon it, my man, you shall be well rewarded for this."

"I shall need no reward. I am doomed. I was stabbed through the left lung and I have been bleeding more or less ever since. But we must act. Here goes!"

With a few rapid strokes of the knife, Sam Tinker set the detectives free.

"You are really the Bradys?" he said, questioningly.

"We are," Old King Brady replied.

"You are here to arrest Boss Bagnall and the others. You mean to break up the gang?"

"We certainly do, if we can."

"Good! Bagnall is a treacherous hound. He thought I knew too much, so he engaged Tony Puzzoli, one of the gang, to kill me. As Tony turned the knife on me I shot him. Well, he's dead and I'm still alive. Ed tells me that Charlie Davis is gone."

"Yes. Shot when we came in here."

"Good riddance to bad rubbish. Charlie was a bad one, and so am I. Well, I've got my reward. I see my finish; but I can die happy if I know that Bagnall goes up for fifteen years."

"I see no reason why he should not now," said Old King Brady. "Are you armed?"

"I've got your rifle inside there. I came on purpose to save you, and a hard job I had to get up the hill; but the worst was moving the stone."

"We must act," said Old King Brady. "Our course is plain. Get on the other side of that door, Harry. We will change clothes. We will show these scoundrels how the Bradys really look."

They now retreated to the inner cave, Sam Tinker following them.

A lightning change of costume was effected.

The Bradys were themselves again.

"You can rely on me, boss," said Tinker. "I'm not so weak but what I can handle a fine rifle like yours."

"It's yours, Sam," said Old King Brady. "I make you a present of it right now."

"If I only live to use it," replied Sam, "I'd like to use it once on Bagnall; but I had rather a blame sight know that he was hammering stone."

"It would be a worse punishment for an educated man like him by far," said Old King Brady. "Sam, however came you to get in this evil business? You seem to be a decent sort of man."

"Oh, it was all through his persuasion. I was a trapper and a hunter and a guide for Boston gents what came down here to fish on the Black Run. I wish to heaven I'd stuck to my business, instead of going in for queer coin-making. Well, I've got my pay. I'm as good as dead now."

"Don't say it. You shall go to New York with us. I'll put you in the hands of a good doctor, who probably may save your life."

"Will you, boss?"

"I mean it."

"Bless you for that. If you can save my life, I'll try to make better use of it, that's all. Many's the time I thought as I lay in the old fishing camp, where I crawled after I came to my senses, that if I could only get a chance to live my life over again that I——. But, say, they are coming! I hear them at the gorge door!"

"Stand ready, Harry!" breathed Old King Brady. "It's up to us to close this case right now."

It was Bagnall and the coiner Almino who were at the door.

Between them they held the cringing form of a young woman, half dead with fear.

This was Miranda Maddock.

It had been decided that she should die with the detectives!

Bagnall suggested it, and the coiners fell in with the plan, for none of them cared to risk the chance of the girl's escape from the camp, well knowing that she would be sure to use her tongue.

So, while Fritz and Henry remained behind at the hut to clear up the remains of the breakfast, Bagnall and Almino started with Miranda.

The wretched girl was past all power of speech now.

She was paralyzed with fear.

Bagnall opened the door and Almino dragged her into the brilliantly lighted cave.

"Heavens! The Bradys have escaped!" cried Bagnall.

He caught sight of the broken lock, and made a rush for the inner door.

Suddenly the door flew open in the very face of the astonished coiner.

In walked the Bradys, each with cocked revolvers, while Sam Tinker, with his rifle raised, pressed close behind.

"Good-morning to you, Mr. Bagnall!" cried Old King Brady. "I'll trouble you to throw up your hands!"

"Pinched at last!" gasped Bagnall, falling back with a face as white as chalk.

He made a motion for his revolver.

Old King Brady, throwing himself forward, had his own weapon against the villain's forehead in an instant.

"Do it and you die!" he hissed.

Crack!

Sam Tinker fired.

Almino was trying to bolt through the other door, when the old hunter dropped him, badly wounded, in his tracks.

"Surrender, Bagnall, or you'll get one, too!" panted Sam. "You know I'm a dead shot!"

Then it was a full surrender, of course.

It could not be anything else.

Equally, of course, Old King Brady's mysterious pockets contained handcuffs.

Bertram Bagnall got the loan of a pair.

"Curse you, Brady!" he hissed, as the old detective snapped them about his wrists. "Why didn't I kill you when I had a chance? What mysterious power is it that always gives you the winning cards?"

"The power of right," replied Old King Brady. "But say no more, Bagnall. Your race is run."

Almino's wound was in the left side, and Old King Brady extracted the bullet.

Miranda fainted twice and then sat crouching in a corner, with her face buried in her hands.

"We mustn't forget the others," said Harry. "Let us lay for them just inside the door."

"They are coming now!" breathed Old King Brady. "Stand ready, boys!"

They came and were captured, of course.

With cocked revolvers at their heads, Fritz and Henry made no effort to put up a fight.

The only thing was to get the coiners of Candle Creek out of the Black Run and into civilization.

The Bradys managed that.

The canoe took them down the creek to the fishing camp, where Sam Tinker had stayed.

Leaving Harry here to guard the prisoners, Old King Brady went through to Tom Maddock's with Miranda.

Here a wagon was easily procured, when the Scotchman heard the detective's story, which the repentant girl corroborated.

It was in Tom Maddock's wagon that the coiners were taken to Bangor and lodged in jail.

Later the detectives drove down to the Black Run with two heavy wagons, securing the coin in the woods and in the cave, and completely destroying the counterfeiters' plant on Candle Creek.

As counterfeiting is a national crime, the Bradys' responsibility now ended.

The United States marshal at Bangor did the rest.

It was impossible to fix the death of Charlie Davis upon any one of the coiners, so when their trial came off all received the same sentence, fifteen years in the penitentiary.

Sam Tinker turned State's evidence and was pardoned.

He subsequently recovered his health and married Miranda Maddock.

Old Tom Maddock is dead, and they now keep the tavern on the Black Run.

Ed Foye was never heard of again. It was believed that he went to sea.

The price paid for the work of the detectives was a liberal one, as well it might be, for never was a case brought to a more successful finish than that of the Bradys on the Black Run.

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS AMONG THE BULLS AND BEARS; OR, WORKING THE WIRES IN WALL STREET," which will be the next number (195) of "Secret Service."

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